Hello Everyone,

My name is Julia A. Burgess and I am a non-licensed mental health counselor in Barre, VT. I am also a person living with chronic health conditions like Fibromyalgia.

Today, I'm here to share my experience and to ask you to please fully fund the administrative costs needed for state fiscal year 2027 to counter federal funding changes and keep 3SquaresVT available and accessible to people in Vermont. Full funding for 3SquaresVT administration is critical to keep this program available for all who are eligible in Vermont.

While I completed my Master's Degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling, I worked full-time in a role where I assisted individuals in obtaining vital support like the 3 Squares Program. The transition from full-time pay to receiving payment for therapeutic services was a difficult one. I went from receiving regular, bi-weekly paychecks to being paid once a month. Further, I had to build a caseload of clients, which took a few months. I am not where I need to be financially… yet, but things are looking brighter in the near future. I began my work as a therapist in June of 2025, I did not receive a livable paycheck until almost October. I ended up having to max out credit cards and use the money I had in order to pay bills, with little left over for food and medications. This is a problem that faces many Vermonters and many Americans.

That's when I applied for the 3 Squares program and was approved. I'm not sure I have the words to express how important this program has been to ensuring that I have healthy food options in order to maintain my physical health to be able to be present for my clients. As a mental health professional, I understand the importance of proper nutrition and the connection to positive mental health outcomes and is highly linked to positive chronic health management. Without the 3 Squares program, I would have either gone without food or I would be eating things that would not be suitable for my chronic health conditions or my own mental health, making it difficult to support my clients and to maintain my own health. Instead, and because of the 3 Squares Program, I was able to provide myself with healthy, nutritious food options that I would not have been able to afford without the help of this valuable program. While I am still needing the support of this program, I expect to be able to receive a livable check within the next few months. I want to point out that, despite what many people believe, this program is here for people like me. The people who are trying to make their lives and their communities better and the people who need just a bit of help to reach their goals. Please remember that we pay for this program through our tax dollars and it is a program that we all may need to rely on at times in our lives. I am very grateful that it was there when I needed it.

Thank you for your time. Please fully fund the administrative costs needed for state fiscal year 2027 to counter federal funding changes and keep 3SquaresVT available and accessible to people in Vermont. Full funding for 3SquaresVT administration is critical to keep this program available for all who are eligible in Vermont, whether they are like me, and temporarily need this program, or for those who rely on this program to meet their food needs each month. Both are important.

Thank you.