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Testimony Regarding the Difference Made by Vermont's Issuance of State-Funded Replacement 3SquaresVT Benefits for First Half of November

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Members of the Joint Fiscal Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Hunger Free Vermont submitted a memo to this Committee and the Emergency Board three days ago with our recommendations for the next actions we believed it was essential for the State of Vermont to take to ensure that the 64,000 people who participate in 3SquaresVT receive, without further interruption, the full food benefits to which they are entitled. I have never said this to a legislative committee before, and perhaps never will again, but given last night's passage in Congress of a Continuing Resolution to fund the federal government, which includes funding for agriculture programs—including SNAP—for the full federal fiscal year, **pending USDA's guidance** to states permitting DCF to issue full federal SNAP benefits within the next few days, I am pleased to say that you may all disregard my memo.

The unanimous recommendation made in October by this Committee to the Emergency Board to use State contingency funds to replace Vermonters' 3SquaresVT benefits in full for the first half on November, the Emergency Board's positive and unanimous approval of that recommendation, and the Department for Children and Families' swift action to get the systems and data into place were right and necessary actions. They were right because they helped keep people fed and well. They were right because they helped stabilize Vermont's farmers and food businesses and communities. They were right because they honored our Vermont values of ensuring the best possible outcomes for us all, even under very challenging circumstances that were caused by a manufactured and totally unnecessary crisis not of our making. Thank you all.

And to the hundreds of voluntary community efforts and the network of overstretched charitable food providers who came together to bridge the benefits gap—thank you all as well.

I would like to close by inviting all of you on the Joint Fiscal Committee, and the members of our State administration who are here today to allow yourselves to be present to the enormous difference you have made—and for all of us to be present to what our collaboration on the road to true and lasting food security makes possible—as I read just a few of the communications Hunger Free Vermont has received in the past couple of weeks:

From a social worker: "I have families reaching out this morning saying they received their food benefits with great relief. Thank you for the work you do. I see the direct benefit and it means a lot to me."

"Yes, things are pretty scary, but having the information so clear and consistent, knowing that intelligent and resourceful humans are with us facing these difficult times is like turning on a light in a shadowy basement. It spreads hope."

"I and we SNAP recipients throughout the state deeply appreciate your work! You're making a huge difference for us. I am a senior Vermonter on 3SquaresVT (SNAP) and depend on that benefit to be able to feed myself. I cannot afford to be without SNAP, either for November or permanently. As a very low-income Vermonter, I am also on Medicaid, and I don't have the assets to replace my normal monthly 3SquaresVT benefit. Without 3SquaresVT, I would be hungry and food insecure -- as would all the other Vermonters who qualify for and need SNAP. Thank you for ALL you are doing to help protect food security and 3SquaresVT in Vermont!"

"I wanted to thank those in power, who so kindheartedly chose to make financial resources available to Vermonters. [Congress] could take a few lessons from them in terms of compassion, humanity and basic human rights. I myself am a disabled S.N.A.P recipient, and I'm so very grateful for the EBT benefits that I receive. I was thinking about all the families who have children to feed, and the Veterans who've risked their lives for this country to keep us safe, and for the elderly & disabled individuals who *have no* families to lean on for support. They, *like myself*, were probably wondering *how the hell* they were going to be able to afford groceries next month. What a blessing, to live in a state that supports basic human rights, in the midst of a country that seems to have misplaced their humanity. That's really all I wanted to say. Take good care of yourselves & Thank you for advocating for those who need it most."