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—Contributor.....Robert F. Smith  
—Contributor email.....robfs52@yahoo.com  
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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Thanks, Rob. I moved your local reporting up to the top of the story. I think without knowing more information, we run the risk of mischaracterizing the whole merchants-can't-treat-customers-differently stuff, and it might turn out to be more outrage distraction from the real issues. I added some info about funding and contact info for 3SquaresVT recipients.

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 No resolution yet in food-assistance funding during  
2 federal shutdown

####END HED####

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3 Confusion still reigns as those needing SNAP benefits are  
4 caught in the crossfire between Vermont and the Trump  
5 administration

####END SUBHED####

6 TEXT BODY:

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7 With the federal government shutdown stretching into  
8 the longest in U.S. history, Nov. 1 was supposed to see the end of

9 full Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) payments  
10 to some 42 million citizens until the shutdown was resolved.

11 Several states, including Vermont, have stepped in to try  
12 to fill at least some of the financial gaps for citizens enrolled in  
13 the state's 3SquaresVT program. Participants received most if not  
14 all of their November benefits on Nov. 7.

15 Vermont State Treasurer Mike Pieciak said on Nov. 7 that  
16 "state-funded partial 3SquaresVT benefits for the first 15 days of  
17 November have been successfully issued to more than 36,000  
18 eligible households" across Vermont.

19 In a statement, Pieciak said he was "proud [that] our  
20 state continues to put people first, and I'm grateful to everyone  
21 across state government, the Legislature, and the state's banking  
22 partners who made this possible."

23 "While the Trump administration is fighting to keep  
24 money out of working people's hands, Vermont is working hard  
25 to ensure our neighbors can put food on the table," he said.

26 SNAP recipients in the area confirmed that they received  
27 payments Friday, though some stated they did not receive the full  
28 amount.

29 In addition, the state appropriated \$250,000 to the  
30 Vermont Foodbank to support additional food purchase for food  
31 shelves to provide food access for those impacted by the  
32 3SquaresVT benefit payment delay.

33 Local food shelves are also seeing an increase in clients.

34 "We're getting slammed," said Amanda Reed, operations  
35 manager for the Our Place Drop-In Center in Bellows Falls.

36 "There is definitely an increase in people using the food shelf,  
37 and more people coming in for breakfast and lunch."

38 Reed said that donations of food and money from local  
39 people have helped.

40 "We may need to take a few more trips to the area food  
41 bank," Reed said, "but I think we're going to be OK."

## How SNAP works

SNAP, known as 3Squares VT in Vermont, provides monthly food benefits to eligible low-income individuals and families to help them buy food. It is a federal program, but is administered by the individual states.

SNAP eligibility is established by the federal government, while the states have some flexibility in setting some of the specific qualifying standards, such as income thresholds.

People can apply for benefits for their households in the state where they reside. State agencies then determine who qualifies for benefits. In Vermont, the Economic Services Division (ESD) of the Department for Children and Families (DCF) administers 3SquaresVT.

To continue receiving benefits, households have to be re-certified regularly.

The federal government sends a block payment of SNAP money to the individual states. The states then load a monthly benefit payment onto eligible SNAP participants' electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards.

They can then use the card much like a debit card to purchase vegetables, fruit, meat, poultry, and dairy products.

EBT cards cannot be used to purchase tobacco, alcohol, vitamins, or non-food items, including pet food.

The federal government distributes about \$4 billion in SNAP payments to the states each month. Nationally, 1 in 8 poor, disabled, and elderly Americans, 12% of the population, qualify for and depend on SNAP as a major supplemental food source.

Approximately 67,000 Vermonters, or about 10% of the population, receive SNAP benefits. While the majority are children, the elderly, and the disabled, nearly 29% of those receiving benefits are working families. Nationally, 38% of SNAP participants are working families.

To qualify for SNAP benefits in Vermont, gross household income must be equal to or less than 185% of the Federal Poverty

76 Level. That is \$2,413 a month for a household of one and \$4,957  
77 for a household of four.

78 Many SNAP recipients work, often in the service  
79 industries, but earn wages that are low enough that they still  
80 qualify for the nutrition program.

81 For example, Walmart and McDonald's, two of the  
82 largest and most profitable companies in the world, don't provide  
83 benefits to a large percentage of their employees. A single parent  
84 of two children who works 40 hours a week for \$18 an hour  
85 would easily qualify for SNAP assistance.

86 Non-citizens have never been eligible for federal benefits  
87 like SNAP.

## 88 **Federal government appeals to** 89 **Supreme Court**

90 The Trump administration said it would restore partial  
91 benefit payments to the states, in response to an earlier court  
92 decision, but said that the government did not have sufficient  
93 funds to cover full payments.

94 Since then, U.S. District Judge John McConnell Jr. of  
95 Rhode Island ordered the federal government to continue making  
96 full SNAP payments by Nov. 7, using all legally available reserve  
97 funds.

98 After President Trump wrote on social media last week  
99 that SNAP benefits will resume only when "the radical-left  
100 Democrats open up government," McConnell said it was clear  
101 that the administration was withholding funding the program for  
102 "political reasons."

103 Later on Nov. 7, the Trump administration appealed to  
104 the U.S. Supreme Court to put a pause on the order. Justice  
105 Ketanji Brown Jackson granted a temporary stay blocking the full  
106 payment requirement. This allows time for the 1st US Circuit  
107 Court of Appeals to consider the administration's request for a  
108 longer stay on the payments.

109 At press time, according to the Vermont Food Help  
110 [website](#), the state will determine by Thursday, Nov. 13 “whether  
111 to issue the second half of [a recipient’s] benefit for the rest of the  
112 month, depending on the state of federal government funding.”

113 3SquaresVT recipients can check the balance of their  
114 EBT cards — which will continue working as usual — [online](#) or  
115 by calling 1-800-914-8605.

116 For questions about the funding, 3SquaresVT recipients  
117 can call the state Department for Children and Families  
118 Economic Services Division at 1-800-479-6151.

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LINKS:

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VIDEO:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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