



Economic Services Division Community Meeting

**Presented by: Miranda Gray, Deputy Commissioner,
Economic Services Division, DCF**

Economic Services' Mission and Vision

Our mission:

To provide high quality service while administering programs to improve economic well-being for Vermonters.

Our vision:

Vermonters thrive with a sense of independence and connection to their communities.

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/esd>

Food & Nutrition Updates

United States Department of Agriculture Reorg

USDA recently announced plans to consolidate the regional offices spread across the country that support the USDA nutrition programs (including 3SquaresVT, WIC, school meals and others) to five hubs located in:

- Dallas, TX
- Denver, CO
- Indianapolis, IN
- Kansas City, MO and
- Raleigh, NC

USDA expects the reorg to occur over the next year. In addition to this consolidation, USDA announced that the new name for Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) will be the Food and Nutrition Administration. USDA recently updated its website with information about the reorganization <https://www.fns.usda.gov/about/reorganization>

Food & Nutrition Updates

New Federal Food Stocking Rule that Affects SNAP-Authorized Retailers

USDA published a new final rule impacting retailers. SNAP authorized retailers are required to have on shelves certain food items for sale and the 2014 Farm Bill required USDA to update these minimum stocking requirements. The changes in the new rule can be summarized as:

- doubles the amount of staple foods SNAP retailers are required to carry, and
- increases the number of required perishable food items at SNAP retail locations.

Staple foods have four categories, based on the food's main ingredient:

- Meat/poultry/fish
- Breads/cereals
- Fruits/vegetables
- Dairy products

The rule is effective November 4, 2026 and is expected to impact smaller retailers and convenience stores the most as these stores have limited space for adding new items.

Food & Nutrition Updates

Telephonic Signature Pilot!

We are working to implement a pilot to allow customers to telephonically sign their interim reports.

More information will be coming as we setup the proper channels for this to function.

Food & Nutrition Updates

Summer EBT (SEBT) Season is Here!

SEBT is a program that helps families purchase groceries during the summer months when school meals are not available. The Summer EBT benefit is a one-time payment of \$120 per eligible child.

Many families will automatically receive Summer EBT benefits if they already participate in:

- 3SquaresVT
- Reach Up
- Medicaid (with qualifying family income)
- The National School Lunch Program

Families with household incomes at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level who are not currently participating in one of these programs will need to complete an application to qualify for benefits. Applications open now through August 28th.

Applications may be completed online summerebt.vermont.gov

Families may also request that a paper application be mailed to them through the SEBT call center. 1-888-354-0012 (Option 7)

Benefits must be used within 122 days, or they will be expunged from a customer's EBT card.

Food & Nutrition/All ESD Program Updates

Vermont Parks Program Continues this Summer!

Unlimited free day-pass access to Vermont's state parks for anyone enrolled in 3SVT, Fuel Assistance, Essential Person, General Assistance, Reach Up, Summer EBT, and WIC.

This initiative is fully funded by generous donations to Vermont Parks Forever, the nonprofit foundation supporting Vermont State Parks. We appreciate your help in ensuring all eligible households know about this opportunity.

How It Works:

- EBT cardholders present their EBT card at the park entrance.
- Clients without an EBT card may present an approved alternative access card (cards available by calling ESD call center 1-800-479-6151 or stopping by a district office).
- Households should inform park staff how many adults and children are entering.

Important:

- Covers day-use entry only.
- Does not include camping or equipment rentals.
- Alternative cards are non-transferable and available only to actively participating households.

All parks are open! Last year, more than 30,000 visits were made to parks through this program.

Heating and Utility Assistance Program updates

Refund and Consumption reports

- We sent out 12.6 Million to Fuel dealers from November 2025- March 2026, serving over around 13,200 households.
- Fuel Dealers now need to account for those funds and how the were applied to accounts. Any unspent funds are returned to us, which are then rolled into next year benefit.
- 65/151 (43%) reports are back in with approximately \$155,000 being returned to date.

Heating and Utility Assistance Program updates

Other audits that are underway

- Wood and Pellet Household that were issued a benefit in the past year are selected and asked to provide receipts. We selected 80/1697 and 13 have been completed and for 5 more we have asked for additional documentation.
- We still have Fuel Dealer audits to complete. These will take place once we have completed the refund and consumption reports.
- Plus we have Crisis Fuel audits. This program is administered by the 5 Community Action Agencies around the state, who do a great job partnering with us. They served 2,863 households this past winter spending around 1.466 million and many more with other funding pots.

Heating and Utility Assistance Program updates

Other happenings in Fuel's world

- Gearing up for July's Wood and Pellet benefit run. We issued their 26-27 benefit to active households, so they can buy it now and that allows green wood time to dry. It also allows for people who heat with pellet to buy them in the off season when they can shop around for the best price. Last year we issued around 1.4 million in July.
- We will also be issuing a 2nd Seasonal Fuel benefit this year to active Seasonal Fuel Households (meaning active "now"), who have an Electric Utility Provider and for whom we have an account number for. The flat rate benefit will be paid directly to the Electric Utility Provider, who can apply to accounts going back to November 2025. This benefit will be issued in mid July 2026.

General Assistance Updates

- The Vermont House and Senate have passed H.938, a statute which establishes the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum.
- This bill has not been signed into law, so as a result DCF is still evaluating how to implement changes in the law.
- While the law contains significant changes to the Emergency Housing program, we expect DCF will have a window of time to implement the law.
- No changes to Emergency Housing are expected on July 1, 2026. Current rules remain in effect until September 1, 2026.
- There will be a GA Community Meeting on June 5, 2026.

Reach Up Coaching IT System

Reach Up is developing an IT Coaching System for Reach Up Services with Tyler Technologies.

The system will include:

- Phase 1: Case notes and appointments
- Phase 2: Family Development Plans, goal progress, and assessments
- Phase 3: Participant portal and resource sharing

The rollout will be incremental, aiming for full development by 2027.

Reach Up Coaching IT System

Reach Up IT Coaching System Goals:

- **Improved Data Management:** Eliminate multiple spreadsheets and provide clear insights on goal progress and obstacle reduction.
- **Reminder System:** Facilitate participant appointments and support case managers and career coaches with documentation requests.
- **Participant Portal:** A mobile-friendly, central hub for participants to track goals and next steps.

Reach Up Introduction

The Reach Up Introduction is a welcoming and informational process designed to help participants understand the Reach Up program within the first three months of working with a Reach Up Case Manager/Career Coach (RUCM/CC).

It provides a clear overview of the program's mission, vision, structure, and available support. Participants are informed about their rights, responsibilities, and the expectations for engagement.

The process helps participants make informed decisions and feel comfortable accessing services.

It also offers space for questions, discussion of challenges, and identifying personal preferences.

Reach Up Introduction: Components

- Mission and Vision
- Appointments
- Case Manager/Career Coach Roles
- Assessments and Goal Setting
- Support Services
- Program Requirements and Accountability
- Eligibility
- Questions

The Reach Up Introduction:

- Provides an overview of core program components
- Helps set the foundation for successful participation in the program
- Is designed to be consistent for all participants to ensure everyone receives the same essential information
 - Creates opportunity to elaborate on topics and/or provide additional program information as needed to meet participants where they are at in their individual circumstance

Legislative Updates

H.938 - An act relating to establishing the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum

The bill aims to replace Vermont's current reliance on emergency hotel/motel housing with a structured statewide "continuum" of homelessness services that:

- Prevents homelessness when possible
- Provides different levels of shelter and support based on need
- Moves people into permanent housing faster
- Uses hotels only as a last resort

H.657- An act relating to enabling unaccompanied homeless youth to obtain certain services without parental consent

- Removes the Reach Up Asset Limit.

Big Bill

- A report due on or before January 15, 2027 evaluating the Reach Up program, including any inefficiencies or gaps in service; an actionable, phased plan that estimates the amount needed to remove the ratable reduction

Stay Connected

Sign up to join our listserv to receive meeting invites and updates about ESD programs:

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/esd/newsletter>

Questions?

Please raise your virtual hand, or type your question in the chat

Next Meeting: September 2026

Thank you for joining us!

Stay Connected

Have a question to a presenter, please contact them at:

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Stay Connected

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