



## City of Alexandria, Virginia | 2021 Policy Agenda

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The Capital Area Food Bank projects that the number of food insecure individuals in Alexandria City will have increased by approximately 34 percent in 2020, to nearly 21,000.<sup>1</sup> Although we are on track to distribute food for more than 1.2 million meals to Alexandria in fiscal year 2021, we are asking for the support of policymakers on behalf of the clients we serve. It will take all of us—across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors—to holistically support the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities. The requests below represent our agenda and recommendations as to how the City of Alexandria government can reduce the burdens of hunger and poverty over the coming year.

### Executive Summary

2021 will provide policymakers with the opportunity to enact changes that determine the pace of recovery, the strength of the rebuild in our region, and the immediacy of the impact on those in need. Below is an overview of the food bank's requests for Alexandria.

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In the last decade, the Food Bank has distributed just over **7 million meals** in Alexandria City. It is clear that we must do more for our clients than simply provide food.

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### **INCORPORATE FOOD SECURITY METRICS INTO STRATEGIC PLANNING AND AMEND POST-PANDEMIC RECOVERY PLAN<sup>2</sup>**

Alexandria's Strategic Plan has been in existence for nearly two decades, forming the scaffolding of the city's attention and investments. ***As such, we request that the city add food security as a thematic area to this planning document.*** This action will be particularly timely, given that review of the document is due by the end of FY2022 and that the city has already begun the process of prioritizing long-term food security strategies through its Proposed Coordinated Community Post-COVID-19 Recovery Plan.<sup>3</sup> ***We request that both the Strategic Plan and the COVID-19 Recovery Plan include explicit metrics that will position policymakers to respond in real time to food security indicators.***

### **ADOPT A CITY-LEVEL EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT**

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is one of the most effective anti-poverty tools in U.S. history. Virginia is one of 28 states to supply its own additional credit that builds upon the federal EITC, and counties

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2011, Feeding America, the nation's network organization of more than 200 food banks, has been using public data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics to assess levels of food insecurity across the nation. Its calculations, which are based on the statistical relationships between food insecurity and its determinants (poverty, unemployment, median income, demographic and household characteristics, food prices, etc.), are released in an annual report called Map the Meal Gap. In May 2020, Feeding America released city-level projections of food insecurity over the course of the coming year based on three possible scenarios of increasingly dire changes to unemployment and poverty rates as a result of the pandemic; this data point is reflective of these projections.

<sup>2</sup> We recommend that the county use our [Food Security Playbook](#) as a resource to identify various metrics for inclusion.

<sup>3</sup> City Strategic Plan Alexandria FY2017 to FY2021," *City of Alexandria*, November, 2017, [https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/council/info/StrategicPlan/CityStrategicPlanFY2017-2022\(1\).pdf](https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/council/info/StrategicPlan/CityStrategicPlanFY2017-2022(1).pdf).



throughout the region are beginning to enact local credits as well. Montgomery County, Maryland provides a nearby example: it created an EITC match called the Working Families Income Supplement (WFIS). *We request the city slowly phase-in a similar credit to the WFIS.* If acted upon in a timely fashion, the city could ensure that this credit supports **more than 9,000** of some of the most vulnerable people in the 2021 tax filing season; this could make a real difference for the workers who have lost jobs, wages, and sadly, even family members due to the pandemic.<sup>4 5</sup>

### CREATE A FOOD COUNCIL

The permanent establishment of a food council or task force can be an important asset to the local government in identifying anti-hunger deficiencies and promoting innovative, operational, programmatic, or agricultural solutions that alleviate hunger. *We request that Alexandria take steps to either create a government-funded council or support the establishment of one through legislative resolutions, involvement in legislative and public proceedings, and the usage of governmental space.*

### PILOT FREE SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAM WITH HIGHER POVERTY THRESHOLD FOR ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility standards for free and reduced-price school meals are set by the United States Department of Agriculture and are applied uniformly across the country regardless of the estimated cost of living in a given district or county. In order to benefit, income for a family of four must be below \$48,470 a year (185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines), but Alexandria's self-sufficiency standard (defined as "what it takes for a family to make ends meet at a minimally adequate level without public or private assistance") is \$80,948.<sup>6 7</sup> *We request that ACPS launch a pilot program in one to three schools to provide free meals to children from families with incomes between 185 to 300 percent of the poverty level (income just above eligibility and just below the city's self-sufficiency standard).*

### CONDUCT A COORDINATED OUTREACH CAMPAIGN TO INCREASE UTILIZATION OF SOCIAL WELFARE

Alexandria is anticipating a revenue decline of at least \$100 million through mid-2021.<sup>8</sup> The pandemic has drastically affected the amount of resources that the city can invest in social welfare and other programs. *Provided that the city will have much less revenue to fund health and human services for the foreseeable future, we request the creation of a coordinated initiative to ensure all federal benefits are being used by the residents who qualify. This campaign should include the*

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<sup>4</sup> Internal Revenue Service, "SOI Tax Stats County Data 2018," <https://www.irs.gov/statistics/soi-tax-stats-county-data-2018>.

<sup>5</sup> Chuck Marr et al., "EITC and Child Tax Credit Promote Work, Reduce Poverty, and Support Children's Development, Research Finds," *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, October 1, 2015, [https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-tax/eitc-and-child-tax-credit-promote-work-reduce-poverty-and-support-childrens#\\_ftn1](https://www.cbpp.org/research/federal-tax/eitc-and-child-tax-credit-promote-work-reduce-poverty-and-support-childrens#_ftn1).

<sup>6</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, "Child Nutrition Programs Income Eligibility Guidelines," p. 16052, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-03-20/pdf/2020-05982.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> "Self Sufficiency Standard Virginia," *University of Washington*, <http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/Virginia>.

<sup>8</sup> "Budget Work Session," *City of Alexandria*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/budget/info/budget2021/BudgetWSPresentation20200401.pdf>.



*establishment of a Utilization Commission of appointed policymakers, clients, and community stakeholders who are able to identify areas for opportunity, improvement, and impact.*