



## Arlington County, Virginia | 2021 Policy Agenda

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The Capital Area Food Bank projects that the number of food insecure individuals in Arlington County will have increased by approximately 50 percent by the end of 2020, to nearly 26,000.<sup>1</sup> Although we are on track to distribute food for more than 400,000 meals to Arlington 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 and to ensure equity is embedded at every step. The requests below represent our agenda and recommendations as to how Arlington County 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 will 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 Arlington County.

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**In the last decade, the Food Bank has distributed just over 3 million meals in Arlington. It is clear that we must do more for our clients than simply provide food.**

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### **ADOPT A COUNTY-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 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), making it one of the few localities throughout the country to offer a refund to further supplement the wages of the working poor.<sup>2</sup> ***We request that Arlington County slowly phase in a similar credit that could support nearly 8,000 vulnerable people who have lost jobs, wages, and sadly, even family members due to the pandemic.***<sup>3</sup>

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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 county-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> 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>3</sup> "SOI Tax Stats County Data 2018," *Internal Revenue Service*, <https://www.irs.gov/statistics/soi-tax-stats-county-data-2018>



### CREATE A FORMAL FOOD ENTITY

Arlington is the only county in the food bank's service area that does not have any form of a coordinating body that is formally designated to engage with all aspects and intricacies of the region's food system. *We request that Arlington County take steps to either create a government-funded entity or support the establishment of one through legislative resolutions, involvement in legislative and public proceedings, and the usage of governmental space.*

### IMPLEMENT "BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL" PRACTICES ACROSS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Feeding America projects Arlington County to have the second-highest increase in child food insecurity (CFI) of any county in the United States in 2020 (216 percent increase; 13 percent CFI).<sup>4</sup> *Although Arlington Public Schools (APS) permits Breakfast After the Bell (a policy that incorporates school breakfast into the formal schedule of a school day) on a school-by-school basis, we requests that APS mandate Breakfast After the Bell for all schools in the district where 40 percent or more of students are free or reduced-meal eligible.* This model has a significant enough impact that it should be a district-wide requirement.

### STANDARDIZE AND INCORPORATE FOOD INSECURITY METRICS INTO STRATEGIC PLANNING

The county's Comprehensive Plan has been in existence since 1960; over the last six decades, the plan has been instrumental in guiding policymakers to track, prioritize, and respond to various measures and objectives for the betterment of residents throughout the county. The food bank requests that food security be included as an element in the plan, and that a more tailored food security strategy be produced thereafter. *We recommend that the county use our [Food Security Playbook](#) as a resource to identify various metrics for inclusion.*

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

Arlington County is anticipating a loss of \$56 million in revenue for FY21.<sup>5</sup> Given the reality of this fiscal climate, we request that the county invest in a strategic and coordinated effort to increase participation in SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT), the EITC, and Economic Impact Payments (EIP). *Through our conversations with advocates, policymakers, and governmental administrators, we request the county activate millions of dollars in federal social welfare by hiring a full-time staffer to work among departments, implement and negotiate data-sharing agreements, and incorporate research-oriented practices into existing and newly created outreach strategies.*

### 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 (USDA) and are applied uniformly across the country regardless of the estimated cost of living in a given district or county; the USDA threshold is \$48,470 a year (185 percent of the federal poverty

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<sup>4</sup> "The Impact of Coronavirus on Local Food Security," *Feeding America*, May 19, 2020, [https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Brief\\_Local%20Impact\\_5.19.2020.pdf](https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Brief_Local%20Impact_5.19.2020.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> "COVID-19 Results in a Revised Budget Proposal Focused on Essential Services and Critical Needs," *Arlington County Newsroom*, April 6, 2020, <https://newsroom.arlingtonva.us/release/covid-19-results-in-a-revised-budget-proposal-focused-on-essential-services-and-critical-needs/>.



guidelines).<sup>6</sup> Arlington’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 more than twice the threshold for free and reduced-price school meal eligibility, and 75 percent greater than the statewide average.<sup>7</sup> *We request that APS launch a pilot program in one to three schools to provide free meals to children from families with incomes between 185 and 300 percent of the poverty level (income just above eligibility and just below the county’s self-sufficiency standard).*

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<sup>6</sup> 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>.