



## Fairfax County, Virginia | 2021 Policy Agenda

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The Capital Area Food Bank projects that the number of food insecure individuals in Fairfax County will have increased by approximately 108 percent by the end of 2020 to more than 121,000.<sup>1</sup> Although we are on track to distribute food for nearly 10 million meals in Fairfax during our current fiscal year, 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 Fairfax 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 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 Fairfax County.

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**In the last decade, the Food Bank has distributed just over 62 million meals in Fairfax County. It is clear that we must do more for our clients than simply provide food.**

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

The county's Comprehensive Plan has been in existence since 1975 and has evolved rapidly to include 11 unique elements in its Comprehensive Policy Plan (CPP). The CPP has been instrumental in guiding policymakers as they track, prioritize, and respond to various measures and objectives for the betterment of the residents throughout the county. *The food bank requests that food security be included as the twelfth element, and that a more tailored food security plan be produced thereafter. We request 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**

Fairfax County is anticipating a loss of nearly \$41 million in revenue for FY21.<sup>2</sup> Given the reality of this fiscal climate, and the uncertainty of congressional response, 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,*

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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> "FY22 Budget Forecast: Pandemic Impacts Projected Revenue, Priorities," *Fairfax County News Center*, November 24, 2020, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/news2/fy-2022-budget-forecast-pandemic-impacts-projected-revenue-priorities/>.

*implement and negotiate data-sharing agreements, and incorporate research-oriented practices into existing and newly created outreach practices.*

#### **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 many counties are beginning to provide local credits as well. Nearby Montgomery County offers an example, offering a refund to further supplement the wages of the working poor.<sup>3 4</sup> *We request that Fairfax County slowly phase in a similar credit that could support nearly 51,000 vulnerable people who have lost jobs, wages, and sadly, even family members due to the pandemic.*<sup>5</sup>

#### **SUBSIDIZE ADULT SCHOOL MEALS AT GRAB-N-GO SITES**

Fairfax County Public Schools has done an excellent job of administering the USDA waiver that enables the provision of free meals to all students during the 2020–2021 school year.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, USDA has designed these programs to support children only, excluding adults from accessing free meals at these Grab-N-Go sites. For parents who must take time off of work or find childcare to get to these sites on behalf of their school-aged children, it would be extremely beneficial if they too received a free meal while there, especially in a county covering 390 square miles.<sup>7</sup> Our clients have expressed this as a primary concern. *We request that Fairfax County Public Schools subsidize meals for adults who would like to obtain food at Grab-N-Go sites.*

#### **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. Fairfax’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 \$86,897; this is nearly twice the amount of the income threshold for subsidized school meal eligibility and is one of the highest standards in the entire region.<sup>8</sup> *We request that Fairfax County Public Schools 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>3</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>4</sup> Chuck Marr et al., *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> Internal Revenue Service, “SOI Tax Stats County Data 2018,” <https://www.irs.gov/statistics/soi-tax-stats-county-data-2018>.

<sup>6</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, “COVID-19 Child Nutrition Response #59,” October 9, 2020, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/covid-19-response-59>

<sup>7</sup> United States Census Bureau, Fairfax County, Virginia, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=0500000US51059>

<sup>8</sup> “Self Sufficiency Standard Virginia,” *University of Washington*, <http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/Virginia>.