



State of Maryland | 2021 Policy Agenda

In Maryland, Feeding America estimates that the food insecurity rate will have reached 14.2 percent by the end of 2020. Within the Capital Area Food Bank’s service area in the state, the food bank projects the number of food insecure individuals will exceed 277,000.^{1 2} Although we are on track to distribute food for more than 20 million meals to Maryland in fiscal year 2021, we are asking for the support of policymakers to reduce the level of food insecurity. 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 Maryland state 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 the state of Maryland.

In the last decade, the Food Bank has distributed just over 135 million meals in Maryland. It is clear that we must do more for our clients than simply provide food.

EXPAND THE MARYLAND EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT TO SINGLE FILERS

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is one of the most effective anti-poverty tools in U.S. history—proven to reduce poverty, encourage work, support the cognitive development of children, and disproportionately benefit communities of color.³ Maryland is one of 28 states that builds upon this federal credit with an additional credit of its own. While the state’s credit is incredibly helpful to working, low-income families, there is room to include thousands of other low-wage earners in the program as well. Currently, workers who do not claim dependents or have children are ineligible for Maryland’s credit as soon as their wages rise above \$14,000 per year. In these instances, a childless adult who is working full-time earning the Maryland minimum wage is not eligible for a credit, even though they qualify for other social welfare programs such as SNAP and Medicaid. *We request the state of Maryland increase the maximum income threshold for eligibility to \$23,450 annually for single filers.*⁴

INCREASE THE MINIMUM SNAP BENEFIT FOR ALL MARYLANDERS

SNAP is one of the most effective anti-hunger programs in history and is designed to ease hardship and respond promptly to economic downturns. Unfortunately, the methodology to determine benefit levels has not been updated since the 1970s, and both the depth and breadth of food insecurity in the state is worsening. *Maryland took a significant step forward by expanding the minimum SNAP benefit*

¹ CAFB’s service area in Maryland includes Prince George’s and Montgomery counties.

² “The Impact of Coronavirus on Food Security,” Feeding America, October 20, 2020, <https://www.feedingamericaaction.org/the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food-insecurity/>.

³ 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.

⁴ This would be the same limit prescribed in Maryland Senate Bill 263 of the 2019 General Assembly session.



from \$16 to \$30 for more than 17,000 seniors; we request that the same action is taken for all other beneficiaries who are struggling to access their next meal.⁵

INCREASE THE REACH OF THE MARYLAND MEALS FOR ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM

The Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) program provides funding to school districts throughout the state to offer free breakfast in the classroom to all students. Most recently, funding for the program has been set at \$7.55 million, but this amount is not sufficient to ensure free breakfast is provided at more than 300 eligible high-poverty schools, 85 of which are in the food bank's service area.⁶ *Based on the estimates provided by the Maryland State Department of Education, we request funding for MMFA be increased by an additional \$4 million, so that all eligible schools are able to participate and so children in need are able to start their school day with a healthy meal.*

CREATE THE MARYLAND AGRICULTURAL SURPLUS SYSTEM

Maryland sits in a region that has one of the highest rates of food loss throughout the country, and sees more than 7 percent of its food go to waste.⁷ Meanwhile, more than six out of every 100 jobs in the state directly depends upon food and agriculture.⁸ By establishing the Maryland Agricultural Surplus System (MASS), the state government can help ensure both that local farmers have a place to send their unsold products and that food insecure Marylanders can supplement their diets with locally sourced agriculture. *We request that Maryland appropriate \$1 million for the Maryland Department of Agriculture to facilitate the donation of local food crops to emergency food organizations throughout the region.*

IMPLEMENT THE SNAP RESTAURANT MEALS PROGRAM

The SNAP Restaurant Meals Program (SRMP) permits individuals who are homeless, elderly, or disabled to use SNAP benefits to buy prepared meals at qualified participating stores, restaurants, or hot meal providers. The SRMP is intended help individuals who may not have the ability or space to prepare meals with grocery store ingredients to utilize SNAP in other ways. *We request that the state of Maryland take steps to activate the SRMP so that recipients can purchase hot meals, both during the COVID-19 emergency and into the future.* This program would make a considerable difference in the lives of Marylanders, especially in our service area, where there are nearly 30 census tracts that are both low-income and more than one mile away from a supermarket or grocery store.^{9 10}

⁵ Michael J. Wilson, "Supporting Seniors: How Maryland Is Raising The Bar On SNAP Benefits," Food Research & Action Center, <https://frac.org/blog/supporting-seniors-maryland-raising-bar-snap-benefits>

⁶ No Kid Hungry – Maryland, "Maryland Meals for Achievement, Breakfast in the Classroom," <https://state.nokidhungry.org/maryland/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2019/11/MMFA-1page-2019.pdf>

⁷ "The United States of Financial Waste," Hloom, <https://www.hloom.com/blog/special-reports/the-united-states-of-financial-waste>.

⁸ Feeding the Economy: Agricultural Jobs by State," American Farm Bureau Federation, <https://www.fb.org/market-intel/feeding-the-economy-agricultural-jobs-by-state>".

⁹ United States Department of Agriculture, "Go to the Atlas," <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>.

¹⁰ The USDA considers a census tract to be "low-income" if the tract's "poverty rate is 20 percent or greater; or the median family income is less than or equal to 80 percent of the state-wide median family income; or is in a metropolitan area and has a median family income less than or equal to 80 percent of the metropolitan area's



ESTABLISH A UTILIZATION COMMISSION TO ACTIVATE FEDERAL RESOURCES AND PROGRAMS

Governor Larry Hogan has consistently taken steps to equip state agencies with the resources necessary to support the efficient and effective administration of anti-hunger and anti-poverty programs. The food bank deeply appreciates this investment, as it has become increasingly critical that governmental agencies have the capacity to handle the rapid and sustained increase in the usage of social welfare programs both during the pandemic and during the recovery to follow.

With an entirely new population facing the difficult realities of food insecurity and economic hardship even as the state projects a revenue decline of nearly \$1 billion by the end of fiscal year 2022, we request a concerted effort to empower Marylanders to receive all of the federal benefits they need and deserve. We recommend that the state create a Utilization Commission to assess how the various agencies involved in the administration of social welfare and anti-hunger efforts can increase participation across the state and activate all federal resources available.

INCORPORATE FOOD SECURITY AS A FORMAL PRIORITY IN AGENCY-LEVEL STRATEGIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE PLANNING

The objectives and measures embedded in strategic planning are intended to monitor performance, increase accountability, and ultimately guide fiscal investments in programs and priorities. At a state level, Maryland's planning apparatus sets the direction of agencies, counties, and municipalities through the tone and template laid out in strategic planning documentation.¹¹ *We request that Maryland elevate the issue of hunger by incorporating a number of food security metrics into agency-level strategic planning.* The food bank has identified several opportunities for agencies to elevate the problem of food insecurity into formal documentation and planning efforts.

median family income." *United States Department of Agriculture, "Food Access Reference Atlas,"* <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/documentation/>.

¹¹ Appendix A lays out the areas where state agencies have an opportunity to incorporate a number of metrics related to food security within long-term strategic planning documentation, or day-to-day administrative operations.