



Prince William County, Virginia | 2021 Policy Agenda

The Capital Area Food Bank projects that the number of food insecure individuals in Prince William County will have increased by approximately 99 percent by the end of 2020, to nearly 58,000.¹ Although we are on track to distribute food for more than 4.6 million meals to Prince William County 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 local 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 Prince William County.

In the last decade, the Food Bank has distributed almost 45 million meals in Prince William County. It is clear that we must do more for our clients than simply provide food.

STANDARDIZE AND INCORPORATE FOOD INSECURITY METRICS INTO STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESSES

Prince William County's Strategic Plan has been in existence since 1992; over the last three 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. *We request that the "health and well-being" focus area within the strategic plan be expanded to incorporate several metrics designed to further equip policymakers with a holistic assessment of food security. We recommend that the county use our [Food Security Playbook](#) as a resource to identify various metrics for inclusion.*

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 is one such area: it created an EITC match called the Working Families Income Supplement (WFIS). *We request that the county slowly phase in a similar credit to the WFIS.* If enacted in a timely fashion, this credit could support nearly 30,000 of the most vulnerable people in the 2021 tax filing season. This would make

¹ 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.

a real difference for the workers who have lost jobs, wages, and sadly, even family members due to the pandemic.²

CONDUCT A COORDINATED OUTREACH CAMPAIGN TO INCREASE UTILIZATION OF SOCIAL WELFARE

Prince William County is anticipating a loss of \$14 million in revenue for FY21.³ *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 (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), WIC (Women Infants and Children), Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT), Medicaid, the EITC, and Economic Impact Payments (EIP).*

Through our conversations with advocates, policymakers, and governmental administrators, we believe the county can 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 AND REDUCED SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAM WITH HIGHER POVERTY THRESHOLD

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. For example, the Center for Women’s Welfare at the University of Washington estimates that the self-sufficiency standard in Prince William County (what it takes for a family to “make ends meet at a minimally adequate level without public or private assistance”) for a two-parent household with two children is \$75,499; this is nearly twice the eligibility threshold for subsidized school meals in the county.⁴ *We request that Prince William 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 the eligibility level and just below the county’s self-sufficiency standard).*

IMPLEMENT ‘HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES’ APPROACH TO GOVERNANCE

‘Health in All Policies’ (HiAP), as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is “a collaborative approach that integrates and articulates health considerations into policymaking across sectors to improve the health of all communities and people.”⁵ *We request that the county implement this approach in daily governance through regular consultation with the Prince William Public Health District regarding legislative or executive action; establishment of a working group to assess current policies that should be revised or removed based on health impacts across the jurisdiction; and the development of interagency memorandums of understanding to assign a framework for the consideration of health in overarching administrative and programmatic work.*

² Internal Revenue Service “SOI Tax Stats County Data 2018,” <https://www.irs.gov/statistics/soi-tax-stats-county-data-2018>.

³ Emily Sides, “Budget realities from COVID-19 cut \$40.6 million from Prince William Budgets,” *Inside NOVA*, May 4, 2020, https://www.insidenova.com/news/politics/prince_william/budget-realities-from-covid-19-cut-40-6-million-from-prince-william-budgets/article_e62aee9e-89c3-11ea-bf4d-bb63bb1090a4.html

⁴ “Self Sufficiency Standard Virginia,” *University of Washington*, <http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/Virginia>.

⁵ Linda Rudolph et al., “Health in all Policies a Guide for State and Local Governments,” *Institute for Public Health and The American Public Health Association*, 2013, <http://www.phi.org/wp-content/uploads/migration/uploads/application/files/udt4vq0y712qpb1o4p62dexilgxnogpgq15gr8pti3y7ckzysi.pdf>.