



Regional Priorities | 2021 Policy Agenda

The Capital Area Food Bank's service area spans five counties and one city across two states, as well as the District of Columbia. Each of these jurisdictions has its own deliberative bodies and governance structures, making it one of the most unique service regions of any food bank in the nation. Yet while the political and regulatory environments are varied, one thing remains constant in every zip code that we serve: food insecurity is a real problem. Across the Washington metropolitan region, close to 600,000 individuals are facing hunger.

Regularly engaging with so many different jurisdictions facing a common issue enables us to learn from innovative and successful policy approaches throughout our service area. Working with a variety of policy makers, we can then advocate for the swift replication of those successes and innovations elsewhere in the region. Our policy priorities reflect many of these learnings and contain several recommendations, including those below, that cut across multiple geographies and levels of government.

EXPAND PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL WELFARE AND ANTI-HUNGER PROGRAMS

Across the region, many individuals qualify for a host of social welfare or anti-hunger programs but are not receiving the benefits they need and deserve. *We request all government actors in our region to work towards the shared goal of increasing public understanding of, enrollment in, and usage of key programs.* Strategies to achieve this outcome include enhancing interagency collaboration, updating information sharing systems and practices, and more proactively identifying and communicating about programs where there is low public understanding and usage.

INCORPORATE FOOD SECURITY METRICS INTO AGENCY, COUNTY, AND COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

Across every level of government, there are strategic guidelines in place. When they specifically include food insecurity, these guidelines can position policymakers to more fully understand its multiple and often overlapping causes and enable them to address these factors more comprehensively. Importantly, including food insecurity metrics in strategic planning documents also allows policy makers to track the impacts and outcomes of resource allocation and policy intervention. *We request that elected leaders and policymakers incorporate the formal tracking and assessment of food insecurity metrics into the work of programs and departments under their purview.* We have created the [Food Security Playbook](#) as a guide for doing so.

EXPAND OR CREATE THE EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT

One of the most powerful ways to alleviate food insecurity is through income support, and few programs deliver this support in ways that are as replicable and impactful as the Earned income Tax Credit (EITC). *Based on the success of several EITC models in the region and throughout the country, we request that policymakers enact similar measures to provide low-income families with a greatly needed economic boost."*

PILOT SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAMS TO ACCOUNT FOR HIGH COST OF LIVING

The Washington metropolitan region is one of the most expensive places to live and work in the United States. Unfortunately, the federal school meals program does not account for the cost of living, regardless of the disparity between eligibility thresholds and self-sufficiency standards (defined as "what it takes for a family to make ends meet at a minimally adequate level without public or private assistance"). *We*



request that state and local governments begin piloting programs that will provide school meals to children and families who make just over the USDA eligibility threshold, but who are still contending with the significantly high cost of living in the area.