



## The Commonwealth of Virginia | 2021 Policy Agenda

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In the Commonwealth of Virginia, Feeding America estimates that the food insecurity rate will have reached 13.1 percent by the end of 2020. Within the Capital Area Food Bank's service area in Northern Virginia, the food bank projects that the number of food insecure individuals will exceed 225,000.<sup>1 2</sup> Although we are on track to distribute food for nearly 16 million meals to Northern Virginia by the end of fiscal year 2021, we are asking for the support of policymakers on behalf of those we serve. It will take all of us—across the public, private, and non-profit 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 state government can reduce the burdens of hunger 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 commonwealth.

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**In the last decade, the Food Bank has distributed just over 117 million meals in Virginia. It is clear that we must do more for our clients than simply provide food.**

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### **INCREASE THE MINIMUM SNAP BENEFIT**

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) is one of the most effective anti-hunger programs in history, designed to ease hardship and respond promptly to economic downturns. Unfortunately, the methodology to determine benefit levels has not been updated since the 1970s, even as both the depth and breadth of food insecurity in the commonwealth is worsening. *We request that the commonwealth increase the minimum SNAP benefit from \$16 to \$30 a month to prepare for the coming absence of federal emergency allotments, and in response to the ongoing effects of the pandemic.*

### **FUND THE VIRGINIA AGRICULTURE FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Virginia 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.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, more than half a million jobs in the commonwealth directly dependent upon food and agriculture. By taking steps to fund the Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program (VFAP), state government can help ensure both that local farmers have a place to send their unsold products and that food insecure Virginians can supplement their diets with locally sourced agriculture. *We request that the General Assembly follow the lead of the*

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<sup>1</sup> CAFB's service area in Virginia includes: Arlington, Fairfax, and Prince William Counties; and Alexandria, Falls Church, Fairfax, Manassas, and Manassas City Park cities.

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

<sup>3</sup> "The United States of Financial Waste," Hloom, <https://www.hloom.com/blog/special-reports/the-united-states-of-financial-waste>.

*Governor's proposed amendments to the 2020-2022 Biennial Budget, and fund VFAP with at least \$600,000 for the upcoming fiscal year.<sup>4</sup>*

### **MODERNIZE MEDICAID TO ADEQUATELY SUPPORT NEW MOTHERS AND IMMIGRANTS**

Medicaid has been in existence for more than 50 years and serves as a lifeline for more than 1.5 million Virginians.<sup>5</sup> Most states have taken action to ensure that the program evolves appropriately for the needs of the most vulnerable among us. Unfortunately, the commonwealth is one of very few states that has not yet moved to modernize the program, thus preventing immigrants and mothers from receiving the health insurance they need and deserve. *We request that the commonwealth repeal the 40-quarter rule, which unjustly prevents immigrants and their families from receiving timely coverage, and extend postpartum Medicaid coverage for low-income mothers from 60 days to one year. Medicaid will continue to play an integral role as the pandemic continues, necessitating sensible and impactful modifications.*

### **AMEND THE VIRGINIA EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT TO ENSURE REFUNDABILITY**

Currently, the commonwealth disregards the refundable nature of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), such that in instances where an individual's credit exceeds state tax liability, the excess credit is not provided as a refund to the taxpayer. The Virginia Department of Taxation estimates that this approach will remove \$212 million from the pockets of low-income, working-class Virginians in FY21.<sup>6</sup> *We request that Virginia amend the credit to allow for refunds that will help lift working poor families out of poverty and enable them to afford nutritious meals and everyday expenses.*

### **IMPLEMENT BROAD -BASED CATEGORICAL ELIGIBILITY**

Virginia is one of only 11 states in the country without a broad -based categorical eligibility (BBCE) rule.<sup>7</sup> BBCE is an administrative provision that would allow the commonwealth to increase the number of SNAP-eligible households by syncing various asset and income tests from other social welfare programs. In 2017, the Virginia Department of Planning and Budget estimated that nearly 26,000 more households each year would receive SNAP if this rule were implemented, and each of these families would also automatically qualify for free and reduced-school meals.<sup>8</sup> *We request that the commonwealth swiftly implement BBCE with a 200 percent federal poverty threshold, and without a resource test.*

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<sup>4</sup> Virginia Department of Planning & Budget, "Governor Northam's Proposed Amendments to the 2020-2022 Biennial Budget," December 16, 2020,

[http://publicreports.dpb.virginia.gov/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=BDOC2021\\_FrontPage](http://publicreports.dpb.virginia.gov/rdPage.aspx?rdReport=BDOC2021_FrontPage)

<sup>5</sup> 2020 Medicaid At A Glance," *Virginia's Medicaid Program DMAS*,

[https://www.dmas.virginia.gov/files/links/221/Medicaid%20At%20A%20Glance%202020%20FINAL%201\\_29\\_20.pdf](https://www.dmas.virginia.gov/files/links/221/Medicaid%20At%20A%20Glance%202020%20FINAL%201_29_20.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Virginia Department of Taxation, "2019 Fiscal Impact Statement," January 14, 2019, <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?191+oth+SB1297F161+PDF&191+oth+SB1297F161+PDF>.

<sup>7</sup> Dottie Rosenbaum, "SNAP's 'Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility' Supports Working Families and Those Saving for the Future," *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*, July 30, 2019, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snaps-broad-based-categorical-eligibility-supports-working-families-and>.

<sup>8</sup> Virginia Department of Budget & Planning; 2017 Fiscal Impact Statement: SB-810.



### **ESTABLISH A UTILIZATION COMMISSION TO SUPPORT THE GOVERNOR'S TARGETS IN THE VIRGINIA ROADMAP TO END HUNGER**

A key tenant of Governor Ralph Northam's *Virginia Roadmap to End Hunger* focuses on increasing participation rates in a range of social welfare programs.<sup>9</sup> The Governor understands that Virginians often face barriers that make it difficult for them to understand, receive, and maintain the benefits of programs that put food on the table, cover medical expenses, or support rent and utility bills. And the complexity in administering these programs across jurisdictions and within different agencies often results in varying participation rates and community familiarity with benefit reach and programmatic intent. *We request 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.*

### **INCORPORATE FOOD SECURITY METRICS INTO STRATEGIC PLANNING, AGENCY PRIORITIES, AND COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLANS**

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, the commonwealth's planning apparatus sets the direction of agencies, counties, and municipalities through the tone and template laid out in strategic planning documentation.<sup>10</sup> *We request that Virginia elevate the issue of hunger by incorporating a number of food security metrics into agency-level strategic planning, along with amending the Virginia Code to suggest that counties consider food security when revising comprehensive plans.* If implemented, these measures would be complementary to the governor's *Virginia Roadmap to Hunger*, which encourages the state to take strategic steps today that will alleviate hunger in the longer term. *We request that agency leads use Appendix A within the full policy recommendation document to guide the incorporation of food security metrics into yearly departmental planning.*

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<sup>9</sup> Virginia Roadmap to End Hunger, October, 20, 2020, <https://feedva.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Virginia-Roadmap-to-End-Hunger.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> 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 operation.