

WASHINGTON, DC 2022 Policy Agenda



For over 42 years, the Capital Area Food Bank has served as the backbone of the region's hunger relief infrastructure. Throughout this time, we have responded to several crises—none more significant than COVID-19. In FY21, the Food Bank distributed 17,138,896 million meals to food insecure clients throughout the District of Columbia. Based on prior experience and direct engagement with our clients and partners, the Food Bank expects to see elevated levels of need for years to come. The policy recommendations below represent practical and impactful interventions that can be enacted in 2022 to build upon our distribution efforts and reduce food insecurity among our 81,210 clients in the nation's capital.



Pass The Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act of 2022

SNAP has proven to be one of the most effective anti-hunger programs in the United States. Since the start of the pandemic, the federal government has reevaluated the benefit mechanism (Thrifty Food Plan) that determines overall monthly household SNAP allocations—resulting in a permanent average benefit increase of more than 21%. Additionally, the District of Columbia has allowed for emergency allotments that have increased the purchasing power of beneficiaries during the national public health emergency. However, considering the cessation of the American Rescue Plan's 15% SNAP boost and the looming expiration of emergency allotments, the District of Columbia has a significant opportunity to improve the reach and impact of the program.

It is estimated that more than 50% of SNAP households exhaust their [benefits within the first two weeks of each month](#). This leaves most participants about [\\$100 short each month of what they need for an adequate healthy diet, resulting in a \\$160 million SNAP food security gap citywide](#). Additionally, the Food Bank estimates that 16% of [fully eligible SNAP households are not enrolled in the program](#). We believe the Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act would alleviate the SNAP gap in the District and incentivize eligible households to participate in the program who currently do not.

Therefore, we request the District of Columbia pass the Give SNAP a Raise Amendment Act of 2022 to prepare for the absence of federal emergency allotments and in response to the ongoing effects of the pandemic.



Increase Grocery Access In Wards 5, 7, And 8

According to the DC Policy Center, food deserts make up 11% of the nation's capital, totaling 6.5 square miles (nearly all these food deserts are concentrated in Wards 5, 7, and 8). This means our clients—predominantly low-income communities of color—have little access to healthy, affordable food.

Based on a survey of 389 clients in D.C., 21 percent indicated that 'access to a grocery store' was their most wanted non-food related service.

Reform the Qualified Supermarket Incentive (QSI):

For two decades, the District has used a tax subsidy program, QSI, to attempt to attract full-service grocery stores into low-income communities with limited food access. Unfortunately, the well-intentioned program has failed to meet that goal—spending millions of dollars and still leaving many communities, especially east of the Anacostia River, navigating food deserts for sustenance and nutrition. Over the last 10 years, only 3% of QSI benefits were invested in Wards 7 and 8, and only 17% in Ward 5. While the Food Access Fund was created to support efforts to bring more grocery stores to Wards 7 and 8, the QSI continues to provide subsidies to grocery stores to break ground in areas of the city that do not need incentives to develop.

We request the District amend QSI to restrict incentives to highest-need, lowest-access areas.

Ensure Food Access Fund Investments Are Adequately Supporting Grocery Stores:

We worked very closely with the Deputy Mayor's Office of Economic Development to see through the creation of the Food Access Fund in FY22; this included a three-year, \$58.67 million capital investment to incentivize restaurants and grocery stores to break ground in Wards 7 and 8. To date, the fund has invested \$9 million in eight food access points (namely restaurants), but only one of those is a grocery store.

We request the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development prioritize the inclusion of grocery stores in future funding rounds.



Expand The DC Earned Income Tax Credit To Immigrant Families

DC, in addition to 28 states and Puerto Rico, builds upon the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which has been proven to reduce poverty, encourage work, support the cognitive development of children, and disproportionately benefit communities of color. The DC EITC, based on the federal EITC, prevents immigrant workers who pay their fair share of taxes from receiving this benefit, unjustly penalizing these residents. As of 2015, [the Economic Security Project](#) estimated that 5,390 families would receive nearly \$5 million annually if DC were to expand the EITC to Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) filers.

We request that the council enhance the DC EITC's impact by allowing all ITIN-filing residents to receive the credit.



Pass The No Senior Hungry Omnibus Amendment Act Of 2021

DC has the highest rate of senior hunger in the entire country: [14.8% of seniors, totaling 12,000 elderly District residents](#), struggle to access their next meal. The No Senior Hungry Omnibus Amendment Act of 2021 would create an interagency task force to shape a District-wide response to this problem, increase SNAP and social safety net participation, and synergize food distribution programming for seniors.

We request the District pass the legislation to drastically reduce food insecurity among the elderly.



Create A Full-Time Position Or Workload To Synergize And Leverage Federal Resources And Programs

During the pandemic, the federal government has enacted the largest expansions and enhancements in the social safety net in more than 50 years. However, a significant number of individuals qualify for many programs, but are not receiving the benefits they need and deserve. This leaves millions of federal dollars, annually, that are not leveraged to support our clients in need. For example:

- [By replicating the USDA's SNAP Program Access Index](#), the Food Bank estimates that 16% of eligible DC residents are not enrolled in the SNAP program; this is more than \$31 million each year that is not directed toward alleviating food insecurity.
- The IRS estimates that nearly 30% of District residents who qualify for the EITC do not receive the credit. As little as a 1 to 5% increase in participation could provide an average yearly benefit of \$2,331 to between 502 and 2,510 families.
- Only 46% of eligible mothers and children are receiving Women, Infants, and Children program benefits.

We request the creation of a position to ensure inter programmatic utilization efforts, programs, and information campaigns are administered within and across departments, agencies, and organizations.

In the last ten years, the Capital Area Food Bank has distributed
126,171,723 meals to food insecure clients
in the District of Columbia.



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