

STATE OF MARYLAND 2022 Policy Agenda



For more than 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 30,705,309 million meals to food insecure clients throughout Maryland. 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 208,560 clients in Montgomery and Prince George's counties.



Enact the Farm to Food Security Act (HB 147/SB 121)

Agriculture represents Maryland's largest commercial industry, and [more than 6% of jobs](#) in the state directly depend upon food and agriculture. And while actors throughout the state took unprecedented steps to support those in need during the pandemic, the Food Bank estimates one in three Marylanders still struggle to access their next meal. A shift to a more sustainable, localized food system will utilize the power of Maryland agriculture to strengthen supply chains, build up local farms, and bring equity to consumption and access. To enhance resiliency and reduce food insecurity, the Food Bank supports the [recent recommendations](#) of the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council regarding the following provisions are codified in the Farm to Food Security Act:

Expanding the Reach of Maryland Market Money (MMM):

MMM has provided more than \$1 million in matching SNAP, WIC, and FMNP funds to alleviate food insecurity and support Maryland farmers and markets since its inception in 2013.

We ask that the state allocation is increased to \$300,000 annually to put more money in the hands of markets, farmers, and food insecure shoppers in the state.

Launching the Farm to School Grant Pilot:

Although school districts have expressed a desire to expand farm-to-school initiatives in Maryland, these efforts currently receive no state-allocated funding or staff. The Farm to School Pilot Grant program would allow Maryland school districts to apply for grants of 20 cents for every meal served that includes a local food component.

We request this pilot allocate \$500,000 across applicant school districts to make local, healthy food more available for Maryland's school children.

Creating the Maryland Food and Agricultural Resilience Mechanism (MD FARM):

MD FARM would help mitigate the economic hardships and supply chain issues of COVID-19 by supporting food assistance organizations to leverage Maryland agriculture for emergency and resiliency purposes.

We ask the Maryland Department of Agriculture to administer \$1.25 million to support Maryland-based procurement, harvesting, contracting, distribution, and processing for hunger relief efforts throughout the state.



Increase the Minimum SNAP Benefit and Lower the Age Threshold to Reach More Seniors

SNAP is one of the most effective anti-hunger programs in history, designed to ease hardship and respond promptly to economic downturns. During the pandemic, Maryland took a significant step forward by [expanding the minimum SNAP benefit](#) from \$16 to \$30 for more than 17,000 seniors older than 62. Additionally, the federal government made its first major adjustment to the program's benefit calculation mechanism, the Thrifty Food Plan since its inception in 1975. The reevaluation has resulted in a permanent [21% increase in benefits](#) for all participants.

However, despite these permanent increases, temporary emergency allotments are set to sunset as the public health emergency ends, and [the average SNAP participant will lose \\$82 in monthly benefits](#). The Food Bank believes the economic impacts of the pandemic will far outlast the public health crisis, with low-income individuals and communities of color disproportionately affected. Maryland has a significant opportunity to improve the reach and impact of the program for its most vulnerable residents by taking two steps. First, the state can increase the minimum benefit allotment for seniors from \$30 to \$45; second, the state can lower the senior eligibility age from 62 to 60. These two actions will put more money in the hands of more seniors.

We request that the state of Maryland expand SNAP minimum benefit increases and lower age thresholds for seniors who are struggling to access their next meal.



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. Food security metrics and priorities should be integrated across various Maryland agencies, as recommended in the [Maryland Food System Resiliency Council's recent report](#).

We request that Maryland elevate the issue of hunger by incorporating food security metrics and objectives into agency-level strategic planning.



Create a Maryland Health Equity Fund

Similar to the [proposed fund in California](#), the Maryland health equity fund would provide grants to community-based organizations and providers to address health disparities and social determinants of health, including food security and nutrition. The state has already taken great strides to implement such approaches, and we believe this grant should build upon the data and understanding of the [Maryland Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities](#) to enable community partners to do the same.

We request Maryland allocate \$1 million to create a state Health Equity Fund to further advance health equity work throughout our community.

In the last ten years, the Capital Area Food Bank has distributed
155,095,429 meals to food insecure clients
in Maryland.



4900 Puerto Rico Ave, NE
Washington, DC 20017
202-644-9800

TO DONATE OR VOLUNTEER, VISIT:
capitalareafoodbank.org