

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA 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 27,607,607 million meals to food insecure clients throughout Northern Virginia. Based on the recent example of the Great Recession, 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 158,730 clients in northern Virginia.



Increase the Minimum SNAP Benefit

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 Commonwealth of Virginia 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 state has a significant opportunity to improve the reach and impact of the program. The current minimum SNAP benefit in Virginia is roughly \$20 a month. Many of our clients indicate that this amount is too little to justify the time and energy required by the application process. Additionally, the [Food Bank estimates that only 44% of fully eligible SNAP households are enrolled in the program](#), and we believe that a higher minimum benefit would further incentivize eligible participants to enroll.

Therefore, we request the commonwealth increase the minimum SNAP benefit from \$20 to \$30 a month to prepare for the absence of federal emergency allotments and in response to the ongoing effects of the pandemic.



Continue Funding the Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program

In the 2021 legislative session, the General Assembly created the Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program, designed to reimburse farmers for the cost of harvesting, processing, packing, and transporting agricultural products that are donated to charitable food assistance organizations. This program supports the more than half a million jobs in the commonwealth that are directly dependent upon food and agriculture, while also alleviating food insecurity.

We request that the General Assembly continue to fund this program on an ongoing basis so that it can support pandemic response and rebuilding efforts.



Pass Dillon Rule Legislation to Allow the Commonwealth Localities to Create Earned Income Tax Credit Programs

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is a federal tax credit designed to boost the income of individuals working in low-wage jobs. The credit has been proven to reduce poverty, encourage work, support the cognitive development of children, and disproportionately benefit communities of color. Virginia is one of six states in the country with a non-refundable EITC structure, which is less beneficial to low-income families. Thus, the commonwealth could make significant progress by allowing localities to create county and city-level EITC programs.

We recommend the General Assembly pass Dillon Rule legislation that would allow localities to create these programs and help lift low-income residents out of poverty.



Amend the Virginia Earned Income Tax Credit to Ensure Refundability

The Commonwealth currently disregards the refundable nature of the EITC, so that individuals whose credit exceeds their state tax liability do not receive a refund of the difference. The Virginia Department of Taxation estimates that this approach will withhold [\\$212 million from the pockets of low-income, working-class Virginians in FY21](#).

We request that Virginia amend the credit to allow refunds that will help lift working poor families out of poverty and enable them to afford nutritious meals and everyday expenses.



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. If implemented, these measures would complement 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 Virginia elevate the issue of hunger by incorporating several 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.



Create a Virginia Health Equity Fund

Similar to the [proposed fund in California](#), the Virginia 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 [Virginia Department of Health's Office of Health Equity](#) to enable community partners to do the same.

We request Virginia invest \$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
134,047,674 meals to food insecure clients
in Virginia.



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