

WASHINGTON, DC 2023 Policy Agenda



For over 42 years, the Capital Area Food Bank has served as the backbone of the region's hunger relief infrastructure. In FY22, the Food Bank distributed 52 million meals to neighbors in need across the DMV. However, we know that ending hunger takes more than good food today; advocating for policies and programs that enable long-term food security, financial empowerment, and health equity is an essential aspect of our commitment to building brighter futures. The following policy priorities—informed by data, community partners, and those we serve—represent impactful interventions that the Food Bank will advocate for in 2023 to end hunger and its root causes.



Increase Grocery Access in Wards 5, 7, & 8

According to the DC Policy Center, food deserts make up 11 percent 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 CAFB survey of 389 clients in DC, 21 percent indicated that 'access to a grocery store' was their most wanted non-food-assistance-related service.

Ensure Food Access Fund Investments Are Adequately Supporting Grocery Stores

CAFB 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 approximately \$23 million in 26 food access points—24 of which are restaurants and only two of which are grocery stores. **We request that the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development prioritize the inclusion of full-service grocery stores in future rounds of funding.**

Reform the Qualified Supermarket Tax 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, this 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 percent of QSI benefits were invested in Wards 7 and 8, and only 17 percent 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 that the District amend QSI to restrict incentives to highest-need, lowest-access areas.**

Pass and Fund the No Senior Hungry Omnibus Act of 2022

DC has the highest rate of senior hunger in the entire country: 14.8 percent 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. Importantly, the Act was placed on the Consent Agenda by the DC Committee of the Whole and moved forward by unanimous vote on December 6, 2022, though subject to appropriations. **We request that the District pass and fund the legislation to drastically reduce food insecurity among the elderly.**





Pass and Fund 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. In 2021, the USDA announced a reevaluation of the benefit mechanism (Thrifty Food Plan) that determines overall monthly household SNAP allocations—resulting in a permanent average benefit increase of more than 21 percent. 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 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 percent 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 percent 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. Importantly, the Act was placed on the Consent Agenda by the DC Committee of the Whole and moved forward by unanimous vote on December 6, 2022, though subject to appropriations. **We request that the District pass and fund 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.**



Improve Client, Agency, and Food Bank Experience Through The Emergency Food Assistance Program

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is a federal program administered by the USDA to help alleviate food insecurity through the provision of free emergency food assistance. Through the program, the USDA purchases a variety of surplus agricultural commodities and distributes funds to states based on various metrics of need. States lean heavily on food banks to oversee the delivery and administration of commodities to smaller recipient agencies throughout their respective regions. Of the 200 Feeding America food banks, the Capital Area Food Bank is one of only six with three states in its service area. Thus, we are held to vastly different approaches and requirements by each state for the same federal program.

Based on our experience administering this program across three states, and after leading an extensive effort to survey other multi-state food banks across the country, we recommend that policymakers amend the program to make it more streamlined, accessible, and beneficial for neighbors, partner agencies, and food banks.

Increase Client Access

TEFAP's authorizing language and commensurate federal regulations require states to ensure that beneficiaries are "needy." Each state takes its own approach to assessing whether a client fits this criterion, often by calculating their percentage of poverty threshold or enrollment in social safety net programs; this equates to varying degrees of eligibility across states, for the same federal program. **We request that DC increase the neighbor income eligibility threshold to at least 200 percent of the federal poverty guideline and remove or loosen other restrictive requirements to increase access to and eligibility for the program.**

Streamline Administrative Reporting Requirements

States have a significant amount of latitude to oversee, audit, and monitor TEFAP administration by food banks and participating agencies. However, based on conversations with food banks across the country, this degree of latitude results in widely different programmatic requirements, deadlines, technologies, and outcomes across the country. **We request that DC set standards for reporting, site reviews, and audits that are streamlined and uniform with other states in the DMV and Mid-Atlantic USDA Region.**

Diversify Commodity Offerings and Allow for Food Bank Input

Food banks have very little autonomy over the types and quantities of food provided for distribution. This can make administration difficult, given that food banks are consistently adhering to nutrition ratio standards, ordering for a range of cultures and dietary needs, and offering a range of products to supplement other services and food items. Additionally, although food banks must abide by the administrative and operational requirements put forth by states within the state distribution plan, food banks often have little input into said plan. **We request that DC continue to incorporate practices to diversify commodity offerings that reflect the cultural and dietary needs of clients and continue allowing for requisite food bank input into its state distribution plan.**



Provide Healthy School Meals for All by Implementing School Lunch at Non-CEP Schools

The National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs provide critical meals for students at school. Many jurisdictions, including the District, choose to build upon these programs with additional funds and programs to supplement federal meals. The nutritional, educational, and behavioral benefits of providing school meals for students are clear; higher test scores, better attendance, proper behavior, reduced illness, and increased well-being can all be correlated with access to healthy meals. Though DC's participation in school meals is vast, not all schools are eligible or able to participate; non-CEP (community eligibility provision) schools are ineligible to serve free school lunches. It would take a minimal investment to fund these schools' lunches and ensure all children have the healthy meals they need to thrive. **We request legislators expand and invest in healthy school meals for all the District's children.**



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. However, 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.**



Prioritize Food-as-Medicine Practices and Approaches in Administration of Low-Income Healthcare

The COVID pandemic has put unprecedented strain on our healthcare and food systems. A poor diet contributes to COVID risks, especially for those with underlying chronic health conditions, and a growing body of research demonstrates that food-as-medicine practices and approaches can be a cost-effective strategy for improving health outcomes. **We request that the DC government begin to take steps to incentivize food-as-medicine activities, so that healthy meals and groceries are reimbursed by healthcare insurance companies, provided by non-profits, and leveraged by providers.**



Support Cross-Regional Strategic Approaches to Food System Resiliency

In response to the pandemic's vast impacts on food security and food systems, the Capital Area Food Bank led a cross-regional initiative to craft a DMV Food Security Playbook. This Playbook provides operational tactics for local nonprofit hunger relief organizations to coordinate a response to food security emergencies while simultaneously building long-term food system resiliency. Alongside the Metropolitan Washington Council of Government (COG), the food bank is committed to building upon the recommendations in the Playbook by crafting strategies, structures, and approaches that hunger-relief actors in the DMV can execute. The first priority of the three-dozen regional food relief actors who were engaged in the creation and review of the Playbook is the development of a centralized distribution dashboard tool: a crowdsourced database where nonprofit organizations can self-report service statistics to increase situational awareness in an emergency. Crafting this type of tool is critical for the region's nonprofits to be able to respond strategically to future food security crises. **We request that government actors support the efforts to implement Playbook recommendations, including the creation of a centralized distribution tool.**



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