

# VIRGINIA 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 the SNAP Minimum 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 percent. 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 percent SNAP boost and the looming expiration of emergency allotments, the state now has a significant opportunity to improve the reach and impact of the program.

The current minimum SNAP benefit in Virginia is roughly \$20/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 percent 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 that the Commonwealth increase the minimum SNAP benefit from \$20/month to \$30/month 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

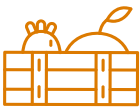
TEFAP's authorizing language and commensurate federal regulations require states to ensure that beneficiaries are "needy." Each state takes its own approach to assessing whether a client fits this criterion, often by calculating their percentage of poverty threshold or enrollment in social safety net programs; this equates to varying degrees of eligibility across states, for the same federal program. **We request that Virginia increase the neighbor income eligibility threshold to at least 200 percent of the federal poverty guideline, remove limitations on the number of times neighbors can access the program in a given timeframe, and 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 nationwide. **We request that Virginia 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 Virginia continue to incorporate practices to diversify commodity offerings that reflect the cultural and dietary needs of clients and allow for requisite food bank input into its state distribution plan.**



### 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 over 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.**



### Expand the Food Crop Donation Tax Credit

In the 2016 legislative session, the General Assembly created the Food Crop Donation Tax Credit. Under this law, Virginia farmers and growers may receive a tax credit of 30 percent of the fair market value of foods donated to a nonprofit food bank (up to \$5,000 per tax year). This program has proven greatly beneficial to supporting farmers' surplus food needs while simultaneously supporting anti-hunger organizations and food insecure individuals. **We request Virginia expand the Food Crop Donation Tax Credit to further utilize local foods in hunger relief efforts.**



## 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.**



## Create a Virginia Health Equity Fund

As a proud member of the Federation of Virginia Food Banks, CAFB is taking part in a multi-year initiative to instill health equity as a tenet of our programmatic and policy work to build brighter futures. A seminal step to address health disparities is to create long-term, sustainable, and reliable funding sources dedicated to this cause. 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 Office of Health's Office of Health Equity](#) to enable community partners to do the same. **We request that Virginia allocate \$1 million to create a state Health Equity Fund to further advance health equity work throughout our community.**



## Policy Priorities for Local Jurisdictions:

### Alexandria City, VA

- Implement a "Health-In-All Policies" approach to governance

### Arlington County, VA

- Pilot universal school meals
- Establish a formalized funding method for the county to support food security
- Implement a "Health-In-All Policies" approach to governance

### Fairfax County, VA

- Prioritize nutrition and food security in the county's "Health-In-All Policies" approach
- Invest in inter-programmatic benefit enrollment experts, hosted at community-based organizations

### Prince William County, VA

- Implement a "Health-In-All Policies" approach to governance



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

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