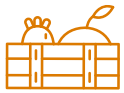


MARYLAND 2024 Policy Agenda



For over 43 years, the Capital Area Food Bank has served as the backbone of the region’s hunger relief infrastructure. In FY23, the Food Bank distributed more than 58 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 2024 to end hunger and its root causes.



Fully Fund Maryland Food and Agriculture Resiliency Mechanism Grant Program

The [Maryland Food and Agriculture Resiliency Mechanism grant program](#) helps mitigate the economic hardships and supply-chain issues of the pandemic by supporting food assistance organizations to leverage Maryland agriculture for emergency and resiliency purposes. It is an opportunity to increase the amount of fresh produce and proteins available through emergency food distribution networks and gives Maryland farmers and producers additional opportunities to sell seasonal or specialty products. This program is currently funded at \$200,000 – well below the initial request of \$1.25 million. **We request that the state fully fund the program with an additional \$1.05 million to address food insecurity more adequately while also providing an additional funding stream for Maryland agriculture.**



Increase the Minimum SNAP Benefit

SNAP has proven to be one of the most effective anti-hunger programs in the United States. The program puts additional financial resources into the pockets of low-income individuals and households, supplementing monthly food budgets and [reducing food insecurity by as much as 30%](#). During the pandemic, the federal government increased the average and maximum monthly benefits for SNAP recipients through “emergency allotments,” which provided at least 95 additional dollars each month to meet the nutritional needs of participating individuals and households. These increases were estimated by [one study](#) to have reduced child poverty by approximately 14% in states that made emergency allotments available to residents.

In Maryland, as in other states, the emergency allotments came to an end in February 2023, bringing the minimum SNAP benefit to roughly \$20/month, a significant loss of resources as many in our region continue to struggle with the lingering effects of the pandemic. In response, some states, [including New Jersey](#), have made the decision to utilize state resources to continue to boost SNAP benefits on an ongoing basis. **We call upon Maryland to follow this model and raise the minimum monthly SNAP benefit to \$95, which would further incentivize eligible residents to apply and increase the buying power of those already enrolled.**



Expand School Meals for Maryland Students

Throughout the pandemic, federal waivers allowed all Maryland students to receive free meals at school. When those national flexibilities ended in the summer of 2022, students and families were forced to revert to completing forms and navigating the administrative processes of demonstrating their eligibility.

Provide Universal School Meals for All

School meal programs have long been associated with a variety of positive outcomes, from [improved attendance rates](#) and [standardized test scores](#) to [reduced overall food insecurity](#), and they were a vital component of the national response to COVID-19. Even prior to the pandemic, Maryland legislators recognized the importance of school meals and took steps to make them more accessible by passing the Maryland Cares for Kids Act in 2018. This law committed the State to covering the student cost of reduced-price meals, effectively making them free for all students below 185% of the federal poverty level. **Recognizing the high cost of living in Maryland and the demonstrated benefits of school meal participation, we call upon lawmakers to go a step farther and make school meals free to all students, regardless of income.**



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.

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 made a series of recommendations in 2023 to amend TEFAP to make it more streamlined, accessible, and beneficial for neighbors, partner agencies, and food banks. Many of these recommendations were included in the Maryland Food System Resiliency Council's [recent report](#), and we look forward to continuing to work with Maryland partners to enact reforms this year.

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 Maryland increase the neighbor income eligibility threshold to at least 200 percent of the federal poverty guideline, remove the identification collection requirement, 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 Maryland 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 Maryland 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.**



Support Expansion of Earned Income Tax Credit for Single Filers

During the 2023 legislative session, Governor Moore and the Maryland General Assembly took significant steps in making most of the pandemic-era expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit permanent. [The Family Prosperity Act of 2023](#) benefited more than 400,000 Marylanders, providing an ongoing source of tax relief amidst the lingering fallout of the pandemic.

However, under the current parameters of Maryland's Earned Income Tax Credit, single filers without children must earn less than \$17,640 per year to be entitled to the credit. This is significantly less than the annual earnings of someone working full-time at a minimum wage job, which is already far below the living wage in our community. We know from our [2023 Hunger Report](#) that more than 75% of food insecure people in our region are employed, and expanding access to tax credits like EITC are a way to provide targeted assistance to reduce poverty and food insecurity among the working population. **As a result, we request Maryland expand eligibility for single filers without qualifying children to \$27,000 per year, which aligns much more closely with a full-time position earning Maryland's minimum wage.**



Ensure Administrative Funding for Summer EBT

During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) operated the Pandemic-Electronic Benefits Transfer (Pandemic EBT) program. Pandemic EBT allowed states to issue benefits cards to children who otherwise would have accessed free or reduced-price meals at school but were precluded from doing so, either because of COVID-related closures or closures during the summer months. This program was one of many authorized to respond to the effects of the pandemic, yet even accounting for that more robust safety net, [studies showed](#) Pandemic EBT reduced food insufficiency among SNAP households and the share of families in SNAP households where children experienced very low food security.

When the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency ended, so did Pandemic EBT. However, beginning in summer 2024, states will have the ability to operate Summer EBT, which is a new, permanent program Congress authorized in December 2022. Under Summer EBT, states will be able to provide \$40 per month during the summer to all students eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. However, unlike during Pandemic EBT, states now need to [commit to a 50% match](#) of administrative funding to be eligible to participate in Summer EBT. **We request that the State provide administrative funding in an amount sufficient to meet the 50% match requirement and commit to doing so each year moving forward.**



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