

MARYLAND

2025 Policy Agenda



For 45 years, the Capital Area Food Bank has served as the backbone of the region's hunger relief infrastructure. Last year, the Food Bank distributed over 60 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 overall well being 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 2025 to end hunger and its root causes.



Increase Funding for Maryland Food Banks

Maryland's two statewide food banks – the Maryland Food Bank and the Capital Area Food Bank – estimate that 1 in 3 Marylanders are at risk of food insecurity. Demand for food assistance remains high among Marylanders and their families, particularly as economic pressures from inflation and rising costs continue. Food prices in Maryland rose 10.5% since 2023, resulting in an average cost of \$4.21 to purchase enough groceries to prepare a meal. As a result, it is not surprising that 35% of Marylanders are finding it difficult to afford their usual and necessary household expenses.


In 2023, an average of 35% of Marylanders with household incomes of less than \$35,000 were food insufficient, and over 1 in 5 families making up to \$70,000 were also facing this reality. Of significant concern – and what alarmingly illustrates a current economic crisis in Maryland – is the 36% of Maryland families who report that their children are not eating enough because food is not affordable.

To continue access to healthy food, charitable food assistance must be strong, stable, and remain a nearby option for those needing the help. Understanding the food assistance needs of our state, the two Food Banks distributed the equivalent of 78 million meals last year alone and do not anticipate this historic need will subside for many years. The Food Banks themselves have also not been immune to rising costs, particularly food prices and distribution and storage costs.

The Food Banks know that not every Marylander, their families, and different populations and communities throughout the state has the same food assistance needs, and we tailor our programmatic response to reflect this reality through the use of both data and anecdotal information from our food-insecure neighbors and vast partner network statewide. Further, we employ a regional strategic approach which allows us to leverage our statewide resources for more localized impact. In doing so, we are able to manage our network of partner organizations for smart growth into areas of unmet need, coordination of food distribution efforts, and partnership with the local organizations who best understand the needs of the populations they serve

The Food Banks request financial assistance from the State of Maryland in FY 2026 in the amount of \$16,992,235.

Improve 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. We have worked with the Federation of Virginia Banks and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) to introduce these recommendations and look forward to continuing to work with our partners to enact reforms this year.

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.**

Expand 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 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 expand commodity offerings that reflect the dietary needs of clients and allow for requisite food bank input into its state distribution plan.**

In October 2024, the USDA published [a final rule](#) that updated TEFAP regulations to increase access to the program and to increase parity within it. Most of the changes took effect on Dec. 30, 2024; however, states have until Oct 31, 2025, for updates of six provisions. We call on Maryland to work with the surrounding jurisdictions of Virginia and Washington, DC to coordinate implementation of these provisions in order to improve TEFAP access for the region.

Implement Same Income Eligibility Across the Region

The new rule standardized income guidelines, so all state agencies will now have set income limits at or above 185% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines. It also requires that states must post eligibility criteria to access TEFAP foods and for Eligible Recipient Agencies on a public website. This is an opportunity for Virginia to update and streamline its eligibility with the rest of the DMV region. **We request that Maryland work with Virginia and DC to increase the income eligibility threshold to 300 percent of the federal poverty guideline. This will help account for the high cost of living in the DMV region and the residents who are food insecure but do not qualify for other federal benefits. We request that when the eligibility criteria are posted to the public state sites it is made clear that the criteria are the same for the entire region.**

Implement Same Residency Verification Requirements Across Region

The new rule no longer requires States and Eligible Recipient Agencies to collect household addresses and instead requires state agencies to develop a process to verify residency, such as self-attestation or gathering zip codes. **We request that Maryland work with Virginia and DC to develop the same residency verification requirements across the region. We request that when the eligibility criteria are posted to the public state sites it is made clear that the criteria are the same for the entire region.**



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.

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.

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) meal service option that allows schools and school districts located in high poverty areas to offer breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students. Rather than collecting school meal applications to make individual student eligibility determinations, schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students who automatically qualify for free meals based on their household's participation in specific means-tested programs; or their status as a foster, homeless, migrant, or runaway child; or Head Start enrollee.

We urge Maryland lawmakers to make school meals more accessible to students by providing state incentives for schools to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision or providing state funding to offset the costs of providing meals to all students free of charge.



Promote Food is Medicine Programs

Food is Medicine, the application of healthy food resources to prevent, manage, or treat health outcomes along with traditional health care, is a growing strategy nationwide to address poor health outcomes. The Federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has encouraged state Medicaid agencies to seek and use flexibility available under current law to provide nutrition supports to Medicaid beneficiaries. To date, 11 states have received section 1115 demonstration waivers for nutrition supports such as produce prescriptions and medically tailored meals. These budget neutral waivers allow state Medicaid programs to help vulnerable patients access fresh produce and other nutritious foods.

We urge the Department of Medical Assistance Services amend its existing 1115 waivers include coverage of Food is Medicine as a benefit for Medicaid enrollees.