

VIRGINIA

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 the SNAP Minimum Benefit for Older Adults (60+)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has proven to be one of the most effective anti-hunger programs in the United States. SNAP 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%.

States have the authority to utilize state funds to boost federal SNAP benefits, which can help offset some of the loss of federal resources. For example, DC and Maryland allocate funds to raise SNAP benefits for certain populations.

Older adults are the second-most vulnerable group at risk of food insecurity. Food insecure older adults are more likely to have chronic health conditions such as heart disease, hypertension, and Type 2 diabetes. They are also more likely to experience mental health conditions like anxiety and depression. SNAP is underutilized by older adults in Virginia, with less than 40% of eligible adults over the age of 60 receiving benefits. Many older adults cite the low benefits amount as a reason for non-participation; many qualify for as little as \$23 a month.

We support legislation that would raise the minimum monthly SNAP benefit to \$50 a month for older adults, which would increase their buying power and reduce food insecurity.

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 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.**

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 Virginia 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 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 Virginia to work with the surrounding jurisdictions of Maryland 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 Virginia work with Maryland 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 Virginia work with Maryland 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 Meal Options

Throughout the pandemic, federal waivers allowed all Virginia 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.

We call upon Virginia lawmakers to explore ways to make school meals more accessible to students, whether through increasing participation in existing options, like the Community Eligibility Provision, or providing state funding to offset the costs of providing meals to all students free of charge. We support legislation to provide school breakfast at no cost to all students at all Virginia public elementary and secondary schools.



Establish Hunger Free Campuses

For many in our region, a college degree represents an opportunity to pursue a brighter future. However, a growing number of college students struggle with food insecurity, making it harder to pursue a diploma and unlock their full academic potential. Recognizing the need for additional resources, the federal government expanded access to SNAP during the pandemic to include more individuals pursuing higher education, but those flexibilities came to an end with the expiration of the public health emergency.

Some states, including Maryland, have sought to meet this need by establishing “Hunger-Free Campus” programs, which provide grants to institutions of higher education that dedicate resources to addressing hunger on campus, including SNAP application assistance and access to on-campus pantries or other local food resources.

We request that the Commonwealth establish a Hunger-Free Campus Food Pantry Grant Program.



Promote Food is Medicine Programs

Food insecurity impacts the health and well-being of more than 700,000 Virginians and is estimated to be responsible for nearly a billion dollars in preventable healthcare costs in Virginia each year. In recognition of the role food and nutrition access can play across a variety of health outcomes, we believe that we need to do more to connect nutritious food and healthcare services to one another.

We request that the Department of Medical Assistance Services amend its existing 1115 waiver and the Commonwealth Coordinate Care Plus 1915(c) waiver to include coverage of Food is Medicine as a benefit for Medicaid enrollees.