

MARYLAND 2026 Policy Agenda



For 46 years, the Capital Area Food Bank has served as the backbone of the Washington metro area's hunger relief infrastructure, supplying nutritious food to kids, families, and seniors throughout the DMV.

Last year, major changes to federal jobs and funding profoundly impacted people across our region, plunging many of our neighbors into economic hardship for the first time, and worsening already difficult financial circumstances for others. Many hard-working families suddenly faced fear of foreclosure and eviction, along with uncertainty about how to afford the groceries they needed. These difficulties were exacerbated by a government shutdown in the fall, as thousands more federal workers and contractors went six weeks without paychecks.

Simultaneously, federal cuts also affected CAFB directly, with the US Department of Agriculture cancelling dozens of semi-trucks' worth of food that had already been ordered, along with millions of dollars in funding that would have enabled the food bank to purchase produce, protein, and dairy products from local farmers.

To fill the gap and meet escalating need, the food bank leaned deeply into the support of our community. Thanks to our generous funders and over 13,000 annual volunteers, we provided nearly 62 million meals in 2025. This was fully 20% more than we had planned for at the start of the year.

In these times, it is clearer than ever that we must advocate for policies and programs that support those who are facing difficult times today, and enable long-term food security, financial empowerment, and health equity in the future. **The following — informed by data, community partners, and those we serve—represent the food bank's policy priorities for 2026:**



Increase funding for Maryland Food Banks

Maryland's network of food assistance providers needs resources to source and store food so that we stand ready to respond quickly to future disruptions and surges in need. Former federal workers and contractors will need ongoing support as they seek new jobs, gain fresh skills, and carve out new positions in the local economy.

We urge the Maryland legislature to increase direct funding for the Capital Food Area Bank and the Maryland Food Bank, as well as the hundreds of local community-based organizations, food pantries, and faith communities that we work with to distribute food to those in need.



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Expand School Meals for Maryland Students

Research has linked the availability of school meals to greater student health, better attendance, improved learning, and higher participation in the classroom.

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 once again required to complete forms and navigate complex administrative processes to demonstrate their eligibility. School meal programs not only were a vital component of the national response to COVID-19; they have long been associated with a variety of positive outcomes, from improved attendance rates and standardized test scores to reduced overall food insecurity.

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows schools in low-income areas to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting individual applications. 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; their status as a foster, homeless, migrant, or runaway child; or as a Head Start enrollee. However, currently about one-third of Maryland schools eligible under federal law to offer universal free school meals do not do so.

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.



Advance Food Is Medicine Programs

"Food is Medicine" refers to a spectrum of programs and services that respond to the critical link between nutrition and chronic illness. These approaches - such as produce prescriptions, medically tailored meals, and medically tailored groceries - are part of a growing national strategy that recognizes healthy food as an important part of patient medical care and treatment.

We believe that the evidence of FIM's potential to reduce health expenditures, improve health outcomes and fight food insecurity makes it a triple-win for Maryland. The state's Department of Health is launching a \$25 million investment in Food is Medicine this year. Focusing on medically tailored meals and produce prescriptions, the Population Health Improvement Fund will target diabetes patients and efforts that address child health and poverty.

The Capital Area Food Bank has collaborated with local health care institutions to pilot Food is Medicine approaches, including the launch of a food pharmacy in partnership with the University of Maryland Medical Center. The programs are contributing to the body of research demonstrating how access to nutritious groceries can support better health outcomes while also contributing to greater cost efficiency in health care.

We urge the Maryland legislature to fund and otherwise support the implementation of the Moore administration's FIM efforts and to explore additional FIM investments to address more residents with nutrition-related illnesses.



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