

VIRGINIA 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 supporters – including essential funding from the Commonwealth of Virginia – 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:**



Local Funding for Direct Food Assistance

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

We urge the Virginia General Assembly to establish funding for a dedicated Neighborhood Assistance Program credit pool for Virginia's seven regional food banks. This will support these food banks, 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.

Additionally, the Virginia Commission to End Hunger recommended increased funding to replace money cut by the federal administration. We support the proposed Virginia Food for Virginia Families package, which includes funding for programs such as Virginia Fresh Match (supporting local farmers by matching SNAP benefits at farmers markets) and the Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program, which would replace the USDA's cancelled Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA) program.



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Expand School Meals for Virginia Students

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, some families were once again required to complete forms and navigate complex administrative processes to demonstrate their eligibility. School meal programs were not only 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.

School children who start the day with breakfast are more likely to attend school, learn better, and participate in the classroom. Free school breakfast has been proven by research to directly address food insecurity, increase healthy diets by ensuring children get essential nutrients, lower obesity risk, and result in fewer nurse visits throughout the day.

We urge Virginia lawmakers and Governor Spanberger to make school meals more accessible to students by supporting legislation to provide healthy school breakfasts for all Virginia students, free of charge.



Advance Food Is Medicine

“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 Virginia.

The Capital Area Food Bank has collaborated with local health care institutions across the region to pilot multiple Food is Medicine approaches, including several “food pharmacies” that provide medically tailored groceries. These 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.

The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services previously encouraged state Medicaid agencies to seek and use flexibility available under current law to provide nutrition support to Medicaid beneficiaries. These budget neutral waivers allow state Medicaid programs to help vulnerable patients access fresh produce and other nutritious foods. Under the new federal administration, however, these efforts have come to a halt.

Due to the delayed response of the federal administration to section 1115 demonstration waivers, we urge Virginia policy makers to look at other options for supporting Food is Medicine initiatives, including state investments.

In December 2025, the Joint Commission on Health Care authored a report to the governor and General Assembly on implementation of a Medicaid In Lieu of Service Food and Nutrition Benefit for individuals with diet-related chronic conditions. We urge Governor Spanberger and the General Assembly to carefully consider the commission’s findings on strategies for implementing food and nutrition interventions through Medicaid.



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Prepare for HR 1 Implementation

H.R. 1 or the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” passed in 2025, significantly shifts SNAP financial responsibility to states, requiring them to cover 5-15% of benefit costs if their payment error rates exceed 6%. Additionally, the states are now responsible for 75% of administration costs, instead of 50% beginning in FY27. Unless the state error rate reduces, starting October 1, 2027, the Commonwealth will be responsible for an additional \$227,347,429 in benefit and administration costs for SNAP.

While this will be a substantial financial strain at the state level, it also is poised to significantly increase costs for Virginia’s counties. Virginia issues SNAP benefits at the county level, and the counties share the administrative financial obligation with the state. Mandating that counties share the estimated \$7,568,345 in new administrative costs is a burden they would be unable to bear without additional financial resources, leading to potential reduction in food security programs. This will lead to an increase in food insecurity across the state, and the Capital Area Food Bank and other food-assistance providers will face significant strain in working to fill the gap.

We urge the General Assembly to plan for H.R. 1 implementation, including budgeting for state costs without cutting access to programs or increasing the cost to counties. We encourage them to focus on reducing the state error rate by increasing state benefit workers, improving SNAP outreach and application assistance, and streamlining application processes.



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