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# 2022 Legislative Agenda

The Maryland Food Bank (MFB) is proud to present its first ever Legislative Agenda for consideration before the Maryland General Assembly. In order to create this Agenda, the food bank has drawn on conversations with others in the anti-hunger and anti-poverty space, data and analysis of our work – including our own original research reports, and 43 years of food assistance expertise.

According to the Public Perception Poll MFB conducted in late 2021, 78% of Marylanders believe that hunger can be eliminated, and the food bank is dedicated to working to that end while continuing our mission of feeding people, strengthening communities, and ending hunger for more Marylanders.

## ► Bolstering Public Benefits

The Maryland Food Bank released its first ever research report, [Do pandemic benefits decrease demand for charitable food?](#) in December 2021. We found that fewer Marylanders sought out charitable food when public benefits were expanded, and demand for food assistance increased when such benefits ended.

With this insight and knowledge, the food bank advocates for increased funding and widened eligibility requirements for Marylanders to access food assistance benefits. Specifically, we support efforts to maximize the use of Supplemental Food Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and streamline processes for populations disproportionately affected by food insecurity in Maryland.

Further, MFB supports the expansion of programs that benefit food-insecure populations. Anti-poverty tax credits in particular, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit, help lift working families out of poverty and spur community development. As such, the food bank supports the continuation and any planned expansions of these successful programs in Maryland.

## ► Supporting the Food Assistance Safety Net

The Maryland Food Bank is very supportive of the efforts of the Governor, State agencies, and the Maryland General Assembly to meet the historic levels of need for assistance throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and continued recovery, including its commitment to food distribution efforts.

Through careful analysis and planning, we expect continued elevated demand for food through at least the next 18 months, though the increase in need will almost certainly last for years. MFB's ability to meet these extraordinary and historic levels depends on continued close partnership with and financial support from the State of Maryland.

## ► Stabilizing Maryland's Food System

The ability of food assistance organizations to provide nutritious food and produce to hungry Marylanders depends on a strong and stable food system. The Maryland Food Bank is the anchor for food assistance efforts statewide,

partnering with an extensive network of farmers, community partners, and state and local governments to reach food-insecure families across the state.

The food bank is also a participating member of the Food System Resiliency Council, established by HB 831/SB 723 (2021), and will continue to support efforts to encourage stronger partnerships among those that are part of the food assistance safety net in order to strengthen food-insecure communities.

Specific bills we support include: The Farm to Food Security Act, HB 147/SB 121, which establishes three programs in Maryland to support Maryland farms and farmers as well as provide fresh and nutritious produce to food-insecure communities statewide. It will increase Maryland Market Money, allowing more food-insecure Marylanders to shop at local farmers markets and support farmers who sell their crops there; create a grant program for food assistance organizations and farms to partner together to expand produce offerings across the state; and reimburse local school districts for meals they serve to students containing Maryland-based crops.

### ► **Strengthening Economic Stability**

The Maryland Food Bank acknowledges that there are root causes of hunger beyond access to nutritious food that are keeping Marylanders and often entire communities food insecure. Achieving economic stability is imperative to overcoming this burden. In a state where 1 out of every 4 people struggle to afford basic necessities and 1 in 3 are food insecure, now is the time for Maryland to look holistically at the factors that make it difficult for families to put food on the table.

The food bank uniquely understands these struggles, based in part on anecdotal conversations with our partners and those we serve, the types of referrals requested for services beyond food assistance, and the case management support provided for the participation in and completion of our FoodWorks culinary training program.

Based on this information, MFB knows that stable housing, access to life-sustaining healthcare, transportation to job and service centers, affordable and accessible childcare, and expanded occupational, vocational, and educational opportunities, as well as workforce development opportunities leading to employment that pays a living wage, are all necessary to achieve economic stability.

Further, families need well-resourced and strong local economies where they live and work, so community development is crucial for economic stability. The food bank will support legislation aimed at addressing these realities, particularly when bolstered by our extensive data and research resources.

### ► **Eliminating Barriers to Food Security**

The Maryland Food Bank is dedicated to eradicating hunger in communities and populations that were food insecure well before the COVID-19 pandemic, and for whom the pandemic has exacerbated their need.

As one example, food insecurity often disproportionately affects communities of color and BIPOC populations based on systemic barriers and historically unjust policies. In working to address this, we listen to the voices of our partners in local communities as well as the food-insecure individuals and families we serve, who best inform and shape our work by highlighting the barriers they are facing in achieving food security. Adding this important and necessary perspective to our own internal data and analysis and the analysis of demographic information in the communities we serve provides a more complete picture of how such barriers are impacting different populations at disproportionate levels.

Armed with this knowledge, the food bank prioritizes for the Maryland General Assembly the removal of such barriers to accessing food and food assistance, and rectifying inequities, inequalities, and injustices that are keeping Marylanders food insecure.