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****Maryland Food Bank Hunger Brief****

Cost of Food Banking Continues to Rise as the Maryland Food Bank Begins FY23

BALTIMORE – The Maryland Food Bank (MFB) is finding it more difficult to meet the ongoing demand for food assistance as the costs to keep food moving at current volumes continue to increase, even as the COVID-19 pandemic loosens its grip.

“Maryland was already one of the most expensive places to live in the U.S. before the pandemic, and now, inflation and rising costs are making things worse for everyone, including the Maryland Food Bank,” said MFB President & CEO Carmen Del Guercio. “We’re buying more food than ever, and with rising food and fuel costs, the situation is just as challenging now as it was during the pandemic.”

In preparation for the start of FY23, which began July 1, MFB’s Board of Directors approved an annual budget for the food bank that forecasts a significant 18% increase in food distribution and programming costs over the prior fiscal year, even before factoring in the costs of operating MFB’s four facilities.

As an example of the sheer impact of rising costs, the food bank was buying roughly 12 million pounds of food at .45 a pound before the pandemic. For FY23, the food bank plans to purchase up to 25 million pounds of food at almost double the cost at .88 per pound.

“Everyone is feeling the pinch right now, and the food bank is not immune to this same economic volatility,” Del Guercio explained. “But the financial impact of these rising costs on our operations is enormous because most of the food we purchase is distributed to our statewide network of community partners at no cost to them.”

Since the start of the pandemic in March of 2020, the food bank has distributed enough food to provide more than 97 million meals, a 75% increase over the same period prior to COVID-19. With so many Marylanders and their families being forced to make tough choices between food and basic necessities, this volume of distribution will likely be necessary for the foreseeable future.

According to a recent food bank analysis, the number of Marylanders relying on MFB’s network of food assistance partner increased by 21% between March and May 2022, while the combination of partner visits, 2-1-1 phone calls, and internet searches for food surged by 30% during that same timeframe. Additional information about food insecurity trends in Maryland will be released by the food bank next week.

“Despite the current economic environment, we are focusing our efforts on building an even stronger, more impactful food bank,” Del Guercio said. “But we’ll need continued support if we’re going to withstand these economic headwinds around rising food and other operating costs.”

The food bank’s FY23 budget accounts for these challenges (both high demand and higher prices) while continuing to execute across each pillar of MFB’s strategic plan, also known as [MFB 3.0](#). This includes ongoing support of MFB community partners by offering free food to the network through December 2022 and maintaining a high level of investments in partner grants. An emphasis on strategic investments in methods of processing local produce for year-round distribution and workforce development as well as process improvement and technology are also priorities for the food bank in FY23.

About the Maryland Food Bank

The Maryland Food Bank (MFB) is a nonprofit hunger-relief organization dedicated to feeding people, strengthening communities, and ending hunger for more Marylanders. Since March 2020, the food bank's statewide food assistance network distributed the equivalent of 97 million meals in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. MFB will continue to meet the immediate needs of vulnerable communities while collaborating with partners to provide resources beyond food and address root causes of hunger so that more Marylanders can become financially stable and thrive. To learn more about the Maryland Food Bank, visit www.mdfoodbank.org.

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