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

Maryland Food Bank Launches Pilot Programs to Reduce Food Insecurity

Organization's innovative programs help identify and serve more Marylanders in need while addressing the root causes of hunger

BALTIMORE—In an effort to better serve hungry Marylanders as rates of food insecurity remain high, the Maryland Food Bank (MFB) has recently introduced several innovative pilot programs to address the root causes of hunger and assist more food-insecure families across the state.

MFB's **Workforce Development (WFD) Partnerships pilot** helps connect Baltimore-area residents to training programs and social services that lead to meaningful employment, while the **OrderAhead** app and **Home Delivery** initiatives expand food accessibility to Marylanders who may not be able to visit their local food pantry.

“These pilot programs are central to our goal of expanding food access and creating pathways out of hunger,” said Meg Kimmel, MFB's Executive Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer. “It's part of the food bank's DNA to innovate. We're proud that we can identify a need, hit the ground running with a new pilot, and learn and evolve as we grow.”

Workforce Development Partnerships

Two of the key drivers of food insecurity and economic hardship are unemployment and underemployment. In Maryland, the highest rate of unemployment is found in Baltimore City—6.8% in total (compared to 5% statewide); this rate increases to 9.6% among Black residents. [MFB's latest research on workforce development](#) shows that 17% of City youth aged 16–24 are neither in school nor working. The biggest takeaway from this data: people without jobs cannot afford adequate food.

A grant from Feeding America gave the food bank the opportunity to address this disparity by piloting the [Workforce Development \(WFD\) Partnerships program](#). This Baltimore-based initiative introduces local residents to training programs and social services that help them find employment in growth industries — information technology, healthcare, and green jobs — that provide family-sustaining wages and are not at risk of automation. Although the pilot program is open to all Baltimoreans, opportunity youth (young adults ages 18-24) were identified as a priority population because of high unemployment rates and disconnect from training opportunities.

“There are lots of great programs aimed at supporting young people, but few offer all the tools to prepare them for jobs in the high-growth, good-paying industries we've identified,” said Eliza Weeks, MFB's Senior Manager, Pilots and Strategic Initiatives. “We're also going the extra mile to help them overcome barriers by providing weekly food boxes and a stipend, giving participants one less thing to worry about.”

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OrderAhead and Home Delivery

Expanding food accessibility also remains at the forefront of MFB's efforts. Throughout the pandemic, the influx of SNAP applications created longer wait periods for applications to be approved, with the average SNAP approval process taking 30 days.

In response, the food bank's Community Impact team launched a pilot program that provided SNAP applicants access to Back Up Boxes (15 to 30 pounds boxes of healthy, shelf-stable foods) ordered through the OrderAhead online grocery ordering system. The app allows SNAP applicants to order food for home delivery in a fast, private, and convenient way.

"We realized quickly that OrderAhead made sense beyond being a 'gap filler' for SNAP recipients," Weeks explained. "It could help us feed people in need that we were otherwise unable to reach. The elderly, people with illnesses or disabilities, college students, and home-bound populations, for example, may not be able to visit their local food pantry in person."

In the exploratory phase of the rollout, home delivery is being tested for a limited number of recipients as MFB works to overcome remaining hurdles to accessibility. Using OrderAhead, an individual can select from four pre-packaged food boxes and the food is then delivered via FedEx to homes statewide, with the exception of Alleghany and Garrett counties.

"We're looking at transforming our work for the modern economy," Kimmel added. "Everyone is used to on-demand consumer service today. We believe that providing our neighbors with the ability to order home delivery — including choices about what they order and how they receive food — promotes dignity and autonomy."

"These pilots are key to the food bank's evolution," she continued. "Our broadened scope aims to treat the systemic causes of hunger holistically — uplifting individuals and opening up new paths out of the economic hardship that fuels food insecurity."

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 91 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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