

# word

our region's fight against hunger begins here.



in  
this  
issue

**Working  
Together**  
page 2

**Youth  
Engagement**  
page 3

**Sustaining  
Hope**  
page 5



#### E-NEWS

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## Raising your voice for advocacy

As State Representative Todd Smola addressed members of our Hampden County member agencies, his message was clear and simple: “We want to hear your stories.”

On January 16, Smola, along with State Representatives James Welch and Brian Ashe, attended our advocacy training workshop at The Friends of the Homeless in Springfield (one of The Food Bank’s member agencies). Dozens of Hampden County affiliates of the emergency food network came together to learn about the importance of advocacy and how to effectively communicate with our policy makers. The state representatives expressed the importance of sharing those first-hand, personal stories of struggles and triumph, which the agencies see every single day. It is those stories which will have the greatest impact on their ability to generate support for emergency food assistance.

Advocacy can be defined as any action that speaks to, or argues for, support for a particular cause or policy. It plays a major role in the fight against hunger on both a local and national level. It brings issues of hunger to the forefront, and provides an opportunity to identify and develop solutions to help families return to healthy, hunger-free lives.

*continued on page 4*

*Pictured above: State Representative Todd Smola (standing), discusses effective advocacy practices with our Hampden County member agencies. Also participating in the workshop were Representative James Welch (center), and State Representative Brian Ashe (left).*

**Working together**



Executive Director  
Andrew Morehouse

Dear Friends,

Feeding our neighbors in need and leading the community to end hunger takes a lot more than perseverance. At its core, it also takes inspiration from, literally, thousands of individuals and businesses that partner with us to carry out our mission every day of the year. We have witnessed extraordinary stories of people — both young and old — who have contributed whatever they can to support their neighbors who are facing tough times and struggling to get by (much less get ahead).

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At The Food Bank, we cast a really wide net into the community because the challenge is so immense to feed more than 200,000 individuals every year. It takes youth to learn about the causes of hunger and what they can do to help. They have taken what they have learned back to their families, friends and schools. It takes the continued support of our volunteers, whose selfless dedication each and every day is a testament to the strength of this community and their willingness to support our mission. Their work is vital to the success of our organization. It also takes the generous contributions of our individual and corporate supporters, which allows us to improve our operations and develop more efficient ways to get healthy food into the hands of those that need it most. Finally, it takes advocates for change to bring issues of hunger to the forefront and empower others to take action and develop a solution. By urging elected officials to support policies that will help reduce hunger and increase food security, you can make a difference.

I have experienced, time and time again, the gratitude on the faces of people seeking food assistance. They know that we care about them and we understand and support their desire to be able to care for themselves, earn a living and/or raise their family. I thank you all, very much, for your partnership. ●

The mission of The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts is to feed our neighbors in need and lead the community to end hunger.

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## Youth get excited about helping others in their community

Whether they're youngsters in elementary school, or seniors in high school, The Food Bank's youth outreach program has been engaging youth across our region and motivating them to take action. As they learn about the issues surrounding hunger, they respond with enthusiasm and excitement in being able to help their neighbors in need.

To help teach youth about hunger—both regionally and across the country—we have developed a comprehensive Youth Against Hunger (YAH) curriculum. With activities and lessons geared for students of all ages, they explore a number of factors contributing to food insecurity, including understanding how food makes it from the farm to your table, the importance of proper nutrition, the negative impact food deserts can have on an area, and the multitude of challenges families face in putting food on the table.

Through service projects and discussions, the students are excited to learn that by working together, they have the power to help others. This is the case with one of our more popular programs, The Springfield Souper Bowl. Now in its second year, we are thrilled to be partnering with the school systems once again to offer this fun and competitive food drive led by the students. This year also welcomed first-time participants from Longmeadow's Williams Middle School.

To get this year's event underway, Rebecca Johnson Elementary School held a kick-off rally prior to the start of the drive. Bubbling with excitement, the kids packed the gymnasium, dressed in food costumes, including cans of beans, soup and peanut butter. For the following week, fifth graders from 16 Springfield elementary schools competed against each other to collect the most pounds of food per student. At the Williams Middle School in Longmeadow, it was the sixth, seventh and eighth grades that competed amongst each other. In the end, more than 8,250 pounds of food was collected in all, which will be distributed to the emergency food network.

The reason The Food Bank's youth program continues to be successful is due in large part to the youth being able to see the immediate impact of their efforts. Whether they collect pounds of food or raise money, they now have a better understanding of the issues surrounding hunger and how their contributions will help. They recognize that by working together, they can make a difference in the community and in the lives of those around them. ●



*Students at Rebecca Johnson Elementary School in Springfield held a Souper Bowl kick-off rally prior to the week-long food drive. Students got into the spirit of the event, dressing in various food items, including fruits, vegetables, peanut butter and other canned goods. (Photos courtesy of Springfield Public Schools)*

## Recent grant award will expand The Food Bank's storage capacity

The Food Bank is excited to announce that we have received a \$25,000 grant award from Feeding America, thanks to the General Mills Foundation. The award will be used to help upgrade our facility by expanding the warehouse's cooler space.

The new cooler space will increase the amount of storage capacity for perishable foods, including fresh fruits & vegetables, dairy and meat. By storing more perishable foods, it will allow us to increase its availability to our member agencies throughout the four counties of Western Massachusetts, and increase the overall efficiency of our warehouse.

"We are very grateful to have been awarded this grant by Feeding America, thanks to the General Mills Foundation," explains Andrew Morehouse. "Because of this grant, we can deliver more healthy food to our neighbors in need relying on the emergency food network."

The installation of the new coolers are scheduled to be completed later this year. ●

## ADVOCACY continued from page 1



*Monte Belmonte (center) donned his Evel Knievel outfit to walk 26 miles to raise awareness and funds for the fight against hunger. Joining him were Congressman James McGovern (left) and several community leaders.*

As the leader of the emergency food network in Western Massachusetts, The Food Bank works closely with our member agencies to strengthen our collective voices. We provide them with resources and tools to engage their clients and empower them to effectively communicate with legislators concerning issues surrounding hunger.

For some of our dedicated partners, opportunities for advocacy also extend well beyond writing letters or emails. For the fifth straight year, WRSI–The River's radio host Monte Belmonte walked from Northampton to Greenfield in November, pushing a shopping cart and collecting money. Although he managed to raise more than \$66,000, the event is so much more than just a fundraiser. It has grown into a vehicle to raise awareness of the struggles of thousands of families in our community by forcing the issue of hunger to the forefront.

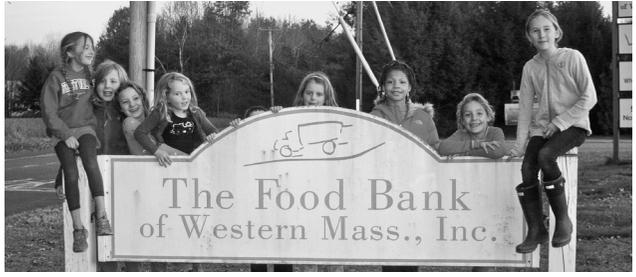
As the event continues to grow every year, Monte has been able to recruit more political leaders to join him in his crusade. Walking for the second straight year was Congressman James McGovern. Not only has he been a long-time supporter of The Food Bank, but is also one of the country's strongest hunger advocates in Washington. Also going the distance this year was Northwestern District Attorney David Sullivan.

While not everyone has the ability to broadcast live on the radio all day, there are many ways you can take action through advocacy. With nearly 55% of our food provided by both state and federal funds, it is vital that we communicate with our elected officials whose decisions impact the health and vitality of our community. With our unified voice, we can help them understand the importance of the emergency food network and the increasing need in our region.

To learn how you can join us to help eliminate food insecurity in our region, join the conversation on social media, or visit our website at [www.foodbankwma.org/take-action/advocate](http://www.foodbankwma.org/take-action/advocate). ●

## Local girls inspire company to donate 1,009 jars of peanut butter

Earlier this Fall, 8-year-old Lavery Greenfield of Hatfield gathered six of her friends to lead a peanut butter and jelly drive at their school to benefit The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. After the month-long drive, the girls collected a total of 1,009 pounds. Inspired by their story, Teddy Peanut Butter



*Lavery Greenfield (second from right) and her friends visited The Food Bank in November to drop off the 1,009 pounds of peanut butter and jelly they collected.*

(based in Everett, MA) decided they would follow Lavery's lead, and donate 1,008 jars (84 cases) of their all natural peanut butter to The Food Bank in the name of the seven girls.

"I was just touched to tears and inspired by the actions of Lavery and her friends," explains Judy Parisella, Marketing Coordinator at Teddy Peanut Butter. "She embodies everything that we want our community leaders to be made up of."

Lavery — along with her friends Sierra, Lucia, Oona, Vivien, Ursula and Lucy — collected donations at Hatfield Elementary School, Smith College Campus School and Hilltown Cooperative Charter Public School throughout the month of October. They even received support from The Smith College Campus School, which engaged their entire 3rd grade class in the drive as a school-wide service project.

The girls' influence was felt across the region, as we distributed all of the collected peanut butter and jelly to our member agencies, who were able to provide it directly to our neighbors in need throughout the four counties of Western Massachusetts. ●

### Sustained hope through challenging times

In 2006, a local couple met with Andrew Morehouse, the then relatively new Executive Director of The Food Bank. The couple were already longtime financial supporters of The Food Bank, including contributions to the capital campaign that same year, which helped double the size of our facility. The first conversation turned into ritual annual discussions that still continue, to this day.

By 2008, their annual meeting honed in on the devastating impact of the early days of the Great Recession. Andrew remarked that the facility expansion could not have come at a more propitious moment, and The Food Bank may be forced to apply their resources towards food purchasing due to the high demand for emergency food outstripping the supply. So moved by this stark reality, the philanthropist couple made a \$1 million donation over ten years through a Charitable Lead Trust.

At a time when unprecedented rates of hunger and food insecurity were being experienced in Western Massachusetts, this gift continues to bolster The Food Bank's ability to distribute more and more food every year, reaching just over 9 million pounds of food in 2014.

Every donation is applied to the mission and vision of The Food Bank. And, everyone who supports us, is literally extending a lifeline to a neighbor struggling to survive in the new state of our recovering economy. It takes more than 15,000 donations to feed the more than 200,000 individuals who rely on us. We rely on everyone. ●

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**thank you**

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