

MEDIA ADVISORY



For Immediate Release

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Food Insecurity Climbing in Western Massachusetts

HATFIELD, MA- The current spike in COVID-19 infections in western Massachusetts is once again adversely impacting businesses and the economy. Renewed restrictions on businesses in three affected communities in Hampden County -- East Longmeadow, Springfield, and Holyoke -- are putting further strain on their bottom line, which is likely to increase unemployment in the coming months. As it has since COVID-19 struck last March, food insecurity will also continue to climb. In fact, Springfield and Holyoke already rank among the five municipalities with the highest food insecurity rates in the Commonwealth.

According to Feeding America, the national network of food banks, one in six individuals and one in four children are estimated to become food insecure across western Massachusetts by the end of this year. In Hampden County alone, 82,000 individuals, including 28,000 children, could be food insecure this winter – a 50 percent increase over pre-COVID-19 food insecurity data. This will place more pressure on the county's emergency food network of more than 100 local food pantries and meal sites that all receive food from The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, including its own direct distribution sites.

According to Christina Maxwell, Director of Programs at The Food Bank, “the Feeding America projections are a stark illustration of the seriousness of the current crisis. When people lose their jobs, they often have no choice but to seek out assistance. The Food Bank and its local partners are here to provide healthy food to anyone who needs it as well as assist with applying for federal SNAP benefits.”

Data reported to The Food Bank from its member feeding sites confirm a steady rise in food insecurity after the initial spike last spring that subsided during the summer. In September, the most recent month of complete data, an average of almost 114,000 individuals sought food assistance across all four counties of western Massachusetts. Of these, 18%, or almost 20,000 individuals, visited a feeding site for the first time.

“Despite the outpouring of community support, and state and federal food assistance to date, we are really concerned about the winter months,” said Andrew Morehouse, The Food Bank’s Executive Director. “We rely on the public sector for about half of our food inventory. Yet, the Commonwealth still hasn’t passed a budget for this fiscal year and the federal government isn’t likely to approve further and desperately needed economic stimulus funding until after the presidential inauguration in January. We hope both will continue to invest funds in healthy food for households struggling to put food on their table.”

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The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts believes that everyone has a right to healthy food regardless of their circumstances. Serving Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire counties, The Food Bank leads the region's emergency food network, distributing nutritious food to households with lower incomes. Since 1982, they have been providing individuals facing hunger with the food they need to survive and leading communities towards long-term solutions to food insecurity by addressing its underlying causes. They are committed to creating a western Massachusetts where no one goes hungry and everyone has access to nutritious food. For more information, visit foodbankwma.org.



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