

# MEDIA ADVISORY



## For Immediate Release

The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts  
97 North Hatfield Road  
PO Box 160  
Hatfield, MA 01038

## Contact:

Andrew Morehouse  
Executive Director  
413.203.4801 (direct)  
[andrewm@foodbankwma.org](mailto:andrewm@foodbankwma.org)

Date: April 5, 2022

---

## **The Food Bank and the region's emergency food network brace for higher food insecurity and prepare for the long term**

The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts is bracing for an increase in demand for food assistance now that most federal benefits during the pandemic have already expired or are about to expire. In the second year of the pandemic through December 2021, the region's emergency food network witnessed a 1% increase in individuals seeking food assistance compared to the same nine-month period prior to the pandemic and no decline in food provided.

The reason for this was the massive infusion of federal benefits during the pandemic, which had the desired effect of reducing food insecurity. Benefits included universal free school meals, child tax credits, stimulus payments, unemployment benefits, and SNAP emergency allotments and benefit increases. These benefits helped households enormously to access food, thereby reducing demand across the region's emergency food network of 173 local food pantries, meal sites, and shelters in all four counties of Western Massachusetts.

In the first year of the pandemic before most of these federal benefits kicked in, The Food Bank and the frontline emergency food network partners responded immediately to skyrocketing food insecurity. The network distributed 24% more healthy food than the year prior to the pandemic for a record high of the equivalent of 13.3 million meals. The network experienced an 18% increase in the number of individuals seeking food assistance to an average of 110,000 visitors every month.

It is expected that demand for food assistance will show increases when data are available for January – March 2022. The expiration of the child tax credit last December has had one of the biggest adverse impacts on households that received it. Food pantries are anecdotally reporting an increase in the number of visitors since it expired, including many new visitors. Barring legislative action, universal free school meals will end next school year in September. This will hurt more children who rely on them every day because there isn't enough food at home. Increased SNAP

benefits in response to the pandemic are expected to end on September 30. Coupled with rising inflation of food, gasoline and other prices, people are really being hit from all sides right now.

Exacerbated by the pandemic, the lack of storage space at The Food Bank's warehouse in Hatfield has forced it to decline more than one million pounds of food donations over the last three and a half years. Other infrastructure inefficiencies at its current facility, like insufficient loading docks, and supply chain issues are constraining The Food Bank's response now and will certainly persist in the future.

Foreseeing this many years ago, The Food Bank purchased vacant property in December 2020 at the Chicopee River Business Park to build its future, larger, and greener food distribution center and headquarters. Its new facility, which will be twice the size of its current facility, will enable The Food Bank to provide more food assistance to more people for decades to come. The Food Bank will break ground on its new home this May, complete construction next spring, and move in over the summer of 2023.

The Food Bank launched a \$26.3 million capital campaign in January 2021. To date, it has raised 96 percent of its goal – with \$1.15 million more to raise. Funding commitments include federal and state grants (25%), individual gifts (22%), federal New Market Tax Credit investment (22%), and corporate gifts (18%). For more information on The Food Bank's building project and capital campaign, visit: <https://www.foodbankwma.org/capital-campaign/>

###

*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 community to end hunger by distributing nutritious food to the region's emergency food network and directly households with lower incomes. It also educates the public about food insecurity and advocates for public policy solutions to address the underlying causes of food insecurity. The Food Bank is committed to creating a Western Massachusetts where no one faces food insecurity, and everyone has access to nutritious food. For more information, visit <https://foodbankwma.org>.*



### **Rural Development**

*This institution is an equal opportunity provider, and employer.*



United Way  
of Pioneer Valley