

# FOOD BANK OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

## Public Policy Priorities 2024

At The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, we lead the community in advocating for food security and promote solutions that address the underlying causes of hunger in our region, including institutional racism and funding inequities. The policies we promote help advance our mission to *feed our neighbors in need and lead the community to end hunger.*

### **Federal:**

#### **Tier 1—We actively work on these priorities.**

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Protect and strengthen federal nutrition programs

- SNAP  
*The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps) provides money to eligible recipients each month to purchase food.*
- TEFAP  
*The Emergency Food Assistance Program is run by the United States Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) and provides food to food banks, which our member agencies distribute to eligible households. Last year, TEFAP accounted for 18% of all the food distributed by the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts.*
- Farm Bill Reauthorization  
*The farm bill is an expansive piece of legislation that governs many nutrition and agriculture programs. Reauthorization typically takes place every 5 years and provides an opportunity to improve and strengthen programs including SNAP and TEFAP. The 2018 Farm Bill was extended through Sept 30, 2024.*
- Child Nutrition Reauthorization  
*The legislation authorizing child nutrition programs should be reauthorized every 5 years, but the most recent CNR was in 2010. It includes the National School Lunch Program, Summer Food Service Program, and WIC.*

#### **Tier 2—We work on these priorities in coalition with other organizations who are taking the lead.**

Protect and strengthen programs that are anti-poverty and anti-racist

- Budget, tax proposals, and welfare reform  
*We work to protect the programs that help people living in poverty by advocating for helpful policies and against harmful cuts when they are proposed.*
- Earned Income Tax Credit  
*The EITC is a federal tax credit that boosts the incomes of low-wage workers while offsetting federal payroll and income taxes. Massachusetts has a state-level EITC to supplement the federal credit.*
- Child Tax Credit  
*During the COVID pandemic, the American Rescue Plan's one-year CTC expansion increased the maximum credit amount, made the credit available to children whose parents had low or no earnings, included 17-year-olds for the first time, and delivered half of the credit via advance monthly payments*

*rather than entirely as a lump sum at tax time. This cut child poverty by nearly 50%, a gain that was reversed after the monthly payments expired. We advocate to bring back the expansion and make it permanent.*

- Encourage participation in the democratic process  
*We do this primarily through voter education and registration. During election years, we also hold candidate forums in contested races.*

Enact and implement relevant pillars of the White House National Strategy on Hunger, Health, and Nutrition  
*In the wake of this 2022 conference, Project Bread convened a group of legislators, government officials, and anti-hunger advocates from across Massachusetts to organize efforts to implement these goals at the state level. The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts sits on the steering committee of that coalition.*

- Pillar 1: Improve Food Access and Affordability:
  - Increased participation in federal assistance programs
  - Community and economic development to increase food access
- Pillar 2: Integrate Nutrition and Health
  - Greater access to nutrition services to better prevent, manage, and treat diet-related diseases
  - Food insecurity screening
- Pillar 3: Empower all consumers to make and have access to healthy choices
  - Update food labeling to be more accessible
  - Make the healthier choice the easier choice
  - Robust and tailored nutrition education

## **State:**

### **Tier 1—We play a leadership role in advocating for these priorities.**

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- Hunger-Free Campus Initiative  
*There is \$1M in the FY24 state budget for a grant program that helps public universities and colleges implement programs to address food insecurity on campus. We are working with the Dept of Higher Education to implement that program with the available funding. Legislation is pending.*
- MEFAP  
*The Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP) provides funding to the four food banks in MA to purchase food. Last year, MEFAP accounted for 30% of the food distributed by the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts*
- HIP  
*The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) allows SNAP users to receive money back when they buy produce at farmers markets, farm stands, and through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs.*
- Transportation  
*Lack of access to reliable transportation is a major contributing factor to food insecurity. We advocate for policies like equitable funding for Regional Transit Authorities and we lead the Western MA Transportation Advocacy Network, which brings together over 175 advocates, planners, legislators, and transportation leaders to share best practices and advocate for better outcomes.*
- Cliff Effect Pilot  
*Although this legislation passed in 2022, we advocate for continued funding while we work to implement the pilot program.*

**Tier 2—We work on these priorities in coalition with other organizations who are taking the lead.**

- Expand food literacy in MA schools  
*We are supporting pending legislation that will require the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to provide resources and guidance (standards) to schools/districts.*
- State-funded SNAP for legally present immigrants  
*Funding was authorized in December 2023 to provide state-funded SNAP benefits to legally present immigrants who qualify. We are supporting the ask for continued funding in the FY25 budget.*

**Tier 3—We support efforts of other organizations by adding our name to sign-on letters, etc.**

- Affordable housing and utilities
- Access to affordable services/education, such as childcare, higher education, behavioral health services, substance abuse treatment, and services for seniors and disabled people.
- Universal access to affordable health insurance
- Farm to School initiatives
- Support other organizations' policy priorities when overlapping and appropriate (for example: MA Food System Collaborative, CISA, MA Public Health Association, Lift Our Kids Coalition)