

FOOD BANK OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

Public Policy Priorities 2025

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.

- SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as food stamps) provides money to eligible recipients each month to purchase food. It is a federal benefit administered by the state.

- 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 food pantries, meal sites, and shelters then distribute to eligible households. In FY24, TEFAP accounted for 21% 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, but the most recent Farm Bill passed in 2018 and has been extended through September 2025.

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

- Protect and strengthen anti-poverty programs

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.

- Budget, tax proposals, welfare reform, and regulatory rule changes

Changes to these policies often limit access to services or cut funding for programs that help the people we serve.

- Earned Income Tax Credit

The federal earned income tax credit (EITC) is a refundable tax credit for low- to moderate-income working people with children.

- Child Tax Credit

During COVID, the American Rescue Plan expanded the CTC for one year by broadening eligibility and the frequency of disbursements. This cut child poverty by more than a third,¹ a gain that was reversed once the expansion expired.

- Oppose changes to Public Charge and other rules that put vulnerable populations at risk.

Public charge is a policy that immigration officers use to determine if an immigrant is likely to become dependent on government benefits, and to possibly deny them a visa, green card, or permission to enter the US. SNAP is not currently included but the current administration has said they will revisit that policy.

- 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.

State:

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

- 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 35% of the food distributed by the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts.

- Hunger-Free Campus Initiative

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 the program with available funding while also working to advance legislation and secure sustainable funding. [HD.2096](#) (Vargas and Domb) and [SD.1567](#) (Lovely).

- 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. We are advocating for legislation to enshrine the program into law [SD.829](#) (Comerford) and [HD.2197](#) (Vargas and Domb)) as well as advocating for funding in the budget.

- 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 lead the Western MA Transportation Advocacy Network, which brings together advocates, planners, legislators, and transportation leaders to share best practices and advocate for better outcomes.

- Bridge to Prosperity Cliff Effect Pilot

This pilot seeks to alleviate the cliff effect, which occurs when a small pay increase causes a low-income worker to lose a disproportionate amount of public assistance, leaving them

financially worse off. This is a major driver of intergenerational poverty. We advocate for continued funding while we work to implement the pilot program.

- Establishment of a commission to study the strengths and sustainability of the state’s food access network. [HD.2378](#) (Domb). *The commission would be made up of government officials, food bank and food pantry staff, and people with lived experience.*

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

- Support state-level work to implement relevant pillars of the White House National Strategy on Hunger, Health, and Nutrition

In the wake of this 2022 White House 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, & 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
- An Act fostering agricultural resilience in MA (FARM bill), [SD.2144](#) (Comerford) and [HD.3621](#) (Blais)
- An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need. [SD.834](#) (Comerford) and [HD.403](#) (Kane)
- An act ensuring tuition equity at the Stockbridge School of Agriculture. [SD.858](#) (Comerford)
- Expand food literacy in MA schools. [SD.1235](#) (Lewis) and [HD.2100](#) (Vargas and Domb)
- Proposal for a legislative amendment to the constitution relative to agricultural and horticultural lands. [SD.1673](#) (Comerford) and [HD.2701](#) (Kane)

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 people with disabilities.
- 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)