

# FOOD BANK OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

## **Public Policy Priorities 2026**

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 advocate for solutions to advance food security.

### **Federal:**

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

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- 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.*

- We will work to increase access to the program and to protect it from cuts, eligibility restrictions, harmful changes to program rules, and restrictions on purchases.

- 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 FY25, TEFAP accounted for 17% of all the food distributed by the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts.*

- We will work to protect and increase funding for food and operating expenses.

- 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 was recently extended through September 2026.*

- We will work to protect programs like SNAP, TEFAP, and other relevant programs from harmful cuts and changes.

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

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- Protect and strengthen anti-poverty programs

*We work to protect the programs that help people living in poverty by advocating for beneficial 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.*

- We will advocate to protect funding for and access to important safety net programs.

- 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.*

- We will work to protect and expand the tax credit, which lifts approximately 10 million people out of poverty each year.<sup>1</sup>
- 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,<sup>2</sup> a gain that was reversed once the expansion expired.*

  - We will advocate for bringing back the CTC expansion and making it permanent.
- 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.*

  - During the last Trump administration, fear that use of SNAP or a food pantry might be included created a chilling effect and kept many immigrants from accessing the food assistance they needed.
- 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.**

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- 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 36% of the food distributed by the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts.*

  - Funded at \$41.5M in FY26
  - We are requesting \$58M in FY27
- Hunger-Free Campus Initiative, [S.2535](#) and [H.4408](#)

*A grant program that helps public universities and colleges implement programs to address food insecurity on campus. We co-lead this statewide coalition with the Greater Boston Food Bank and the Mass Law Reform Institute.*

  - Funded at \$500,000 in FY26
  - We are asking for \$3M, with funding to come from Fair Share (Millionaire's Tax) revenues.
  - 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.
- 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 ([S.104](#) (Comerford) and [H.222](#) (Vargas and Domb)) as well as advocating for funding in the budget.*

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<sup>1</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, EITC Research Findings, October 2015. <http://www.cbpp.org>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Social, Economic, and Housing Statistics Division, The Impact of the 2021 Expanded Child Tax Credit on Child Poverty, 2022.

- Funded at \$21.4M (plus \$7.5M in supplemental budget) in FY26
- We are asking for \$28.5M in FY27, which allows the program to operate year-round.

➤ 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.*

- Regional Transit Authorities received \$204M in FY26.
- We are asking for \$280M in FY27.

➤ Bridge to Prosperity Cliff Effect Pilot (a project of Springfield Works, with whom we partner)

*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. Although this legislation passed in 2022, we advocate for continued funding while we work to implement the pilot program.*

- We're working to get funding for the Pilot added to An Act significantly alleviating poverty, [HD.4622](#) (Decker)
- Funded at \$100,000 in FY26.
- We're requesting \$2.5M in FY27.

➤ Establishment of a commission to study the strengths and sustainability of the state's food access network, [H.118](#) (Domb)

*The commission would be made up of government officials, food bank and food pantry staff, and people with lived experience.*

- We support the establishment of this commission and believe that it could bring more awareness and support to the food access network.

➤ Funding for nutrition education to replace the SNAP-Ed funding that was eliminated in HR1.

*The federal budget reconciliation bill that passed in July eliminated the SNAP-Ed program. It had funded the Food Bank's entire nutrition program for several years. We will advocate for the state to fund a similar program, to be paid for with Fair Share (Millionaire's Tax) funds.*

**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.*

- [Make Hunger History Coalition](#): Our goal is to end hunger for all 6.9 million Massachusetts residents and fundamentally transform the landscape, eradicating hunger through policy change, community engagement, and collective action.

➤ An Act fostering agricultural resilience in MA (FARM bill), [S.55](#) (Comerford) and [H.112](#) (Blais)

*Massachusetts farmers struggle with sustainability in the face of increasing costs, restrictive regulations, and fewer supportive resources than are available to farmers in other states. This bill would:*

- *direct the MA Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) to incorporate food production and distribution capacity into disaster planning,*
- *establish a state food system coordinator position*
- *require the MA Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) and the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to maximize the amount of local food that is distributed to MA residents through state food assistance programs, while maintaining affordability for food banks*
- *make permanent the food security infrastructure grant program to support equitable access to healthy, local food and to strengthen food supply and distribution systems across the commonwealth*
- *reduce barriers farmers face in applying for, qualifying for, and maintaining coverage under state safety net programs*
- *establish a Next Generation Farmers Fund to provide education grants*
- *and more*

➤ An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need, [S.1043](#) (Comerford) and [H.3154](#) (Kane)  
*Many tons of edible food are wasted each year due to donors' concerns about liability. This bill would provide civil liability protection and a tax credit for farmers to cover the cost of the food.*

➤ An act ensuring tuition equity at the Stockbridge School of Agriculture, [S.920](#) (Comerford)  
*The associate degree program at the Stockbridge School would be included in the statewide program that provides free tuition at community colleges.*

➤ Expand food literacy in MA schools, [S.392](#) (Lewis) and [H.735](#) (Vargas and Domb)  
*This bill would add food literacy to the list of topics that students should learn about in school, and provide the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) with resources to support those lessons.*

- *This work was funded at \$250,000 in FY26.*

➤ Proposal for a legislative amendment to the constitution relative to agricultural and horticultural lands, [SD.1673](#) (Comerford) and [HD.2701](#) (Kane)  
*The MA Constitution authorizes a lower tax rate for farmland, but only for parcels greater than 5 acres. In Western MA especially, many farmers farm on multiple smaller parcels, and rising land prices put larger parcels out of reach for many, especially young farmers and farmers of color. The proposed amendment would remove the acreage requirement and make farmland of any size eligible for tax relief.*

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

- Affordable food, 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)