

January 20, 2023

Honorable Karen Spilka
President of the Senate

Honorable Ron Marino
Speaker of the House of
Representative

CC: Members of the Senate and
House of Representative

Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St
Boston, MA 02108

Dear Senate President Spilka and Speaker Mariano:

With the start of a new legislative session and the legislature's track record of support for critical food security policy solutions, our state has an opportunity to be a national leader in permanently solving hunger.

At the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health in September, our state had one of the largest delegations of attendees, including nonprofit leaders, individuals with lived experience, and state legislators. President Biden gave the directive in his opening remarks at the White House Conference to embrace bold solutions that will end hunger in our country by 2030.

Energized by and building upon the momentum of that historic day, the Massachusetts attendees came together around a goal to map out a path to end hunger in Massachusetts by 2030. Massachusetts is already leading on, or on the cusp of, some of the most impactful solutions to hunger, from free school meals for all to integrating food access into health care to awareness building and outreach about the federal nutrition programs. The next steps are an opportunity for you, your colleagues, and our state to build on our national leadership and permanently solve hunger in Massachusetts.

In this historic moment, the undersigned 19 attendees, representing advocates, food relief organizations, health care, food retail, agriculture, academics, elected officials, and individuals with lived experience of food insecurity, have identified critical early steps. These early recommendations, and the roadmap to come, focus on five pillars that must be the focus of any plan to move from responding with food relief to permanently solving hunger in the Commonwealth:

Pillar 1: Increasing access and improving quality of child nutrition programs

Pillar 2: Increasing access and affordability of food for all

Pillar 3: Integrating food access into health care

Pillar 4: Strengthening and integrating the local food system

Pillar 5: Ensure economic stability and promote economic opportunities to address the root causes of hunger

From these, three immediate priorities emerged for the legislature:

1. **Extend and make School Meals for All permanent.** School meals can account for nearly half of a student's daily calories and help set a foundation for educational success as well as improved health outcomes. Before the pandemic, far too many schools were stuck in an outdated tiered eligibility system that creates barriers of paperwork, cost, and stigma. For the last few years, schools, families, and students have experienced a better system where every student is able to receive meals if they want or need them, allowing more than 400,000 students greater access to school meals. An additional 53,744 students participated in school lunch between March 2019 and March 2022.
2. **Adopt policies and appropriate funds to provide additional cash assistance to families through the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child and Family Tax Credit and larger grants as part of the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) or Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children (EAEDC).** While access to sufficient, healthy food is a complicated problem, there are simple truths. The expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) was a proof point that increasing a household's disposable income can dramatically reduce food insecurity. Using Census Data, Project Bread found that in July 2021, an estimated 70% of households in Massachusetts that received the CTC spent the payment on food, rent, utilities, or debt. The highest category was food, underscoring the importance of cash assistance - like TAFDC and EAEDC - in helping families in Massachusetts meet basic needs.
3. **Establish a high-level official to coordinate a cross-agency response to ending hunger and promote nutrition as a demonstration of the Commonwealth's commitment to, and leadership on, this issue.** This official would coordinate across agencies and with legislators and advocates to advance all 5 pillars and work to end hunger in the Commonwealth by 2030. The Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Department of Agricultural Resources, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Department of Public Health, and Department of Transitional Assistance all play a key role in operating or supporting food security programs. In addition, there are over 1,000 hunger relief organizations in the state. A high-level official can convene key stakeholders to ensure policies and programs are fitting together to permanently solve hunger.

We have sent similar recommendations to Governor Healey with an additional recommendation around quickly and robustly implementing the Common Application passed into law by the legislature.

We will be convening additional partners and working on a longer-term plan in the coming months. We want to first demonstrate, with you, some early successes here in Massachusetts that will set us on a path to food security for all residents of the Commonwealth and illustrate to all stakeholders that this vision is attainable. Success of any strategy here in Massachusetts will require early progress on these immediate items. We look forward to working with you to collectively achieve them and make Massachusetts a national model for permanently solving hunger.

Sincerely,

Project Bread

Massachusetts Food System Collaborative

About Fresh

Maryann Broxton, consultant on
multidimensional poverty and hunger

Boston Medical Center

Children's HealthWatch

Mass General Brigham

Community Servings

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Daily Table

Regional Environmental Council of Central
MA (REC)

Daniel's Table

Stone Soup Café

Friedman School of Nutrition Science and
Policy at Tufts University

The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts

Harvard Law School Food Law and Policy
Clinic

The Greater Boston Food Bank

Lovin' Spoonfuls

Worcester County Food Bank