



The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank Public Policy Position Statement

We believe...

- That everyone in need deserves enough to eat, no matter their ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, disability, marital status, citizenship, or any other characteristic.
- The solution to hunger must involve the continued partnership of government and charities working together to ensure that everyone has access to nutritious, health-sustaining food. Food banks can't do this work alone.
- That community advocates can make a difference when they raise their voices on behalf of individuals and families vulnerable to food insecurity.

Background: Hunger is on the rise again, after several years of decline following the Great Recession

Hunger in the Blue Ridge region was far too prevalent *before* the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fiscal year 2019, we served an average of 103,500 individuals each month—down from the Great Recession peak of 120,000 per month, but many more than those served before the Great Recession began in 2007. By 2017 (the end of the seven-year recovery)¹, the number of individuals we served dropped by 13 percent. Food assistance needs continued downward, but never dropped back to pre-Recession levels. Many households remained in need due to low-wage, service sector jobs and part-time positions that were added to the economy during the recovery.

At the start of 2020, the coronavirus was spreading around the world. By mid-March, the pandemic crushed the U.S. economy. The resulting job losses devastated households as swiftly and dramatically as the virus. In fiscal year 2020, the Food Bank served an average of 115,390 individuals each month, including a pandemic-driven high of more than 130,000 per month in the spring. The Food Bank network experienced a 32 percent increase in people served between March and May 2020, versus the year before. Twenty percent of the households served were new to receiving emergency food assistance, compared to 6 percent of new households needing help in the same period of the previous year. Today, the pandemic continues to threaten lives and livelihoods.

Position: We support federal financial assistance to those economically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic

Congress passed three stimulus bills to provide emergency financial assistance to individuals and families during the COVID pandemic. The supplemental income kept families afloat, and prevented most food banks from becoming overwhelmed by outsized demands for food. Those temporary income provisions expired in July with no new safety net in sight. *Without federal assistance for low-income and laid-off workers, food banks will be challenged to meet anticipated demands.*

We urge Congress to re-instate temporary, supplemental unemployment payments at a meaningful level. These funds serve as a lifeline for laid-off and furloughed workers—many of whom struggled financially before the pandemic.

In addition, we urge Congress to approve another round of stimulus payments for eligible households and families with eligible dependents. The payments reduce financial burdens for low-income families who have trouble affording all their basic necessities.

These federal resources have kept vulnerable households from falling into poverty and overwhelming charitable organizations with large increases in utilization.

Position: We support expanded SNAP benefits

We support temporary increases for households receiving benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). We have asked Congress for a 15 percent increase to SNAP benefits and a higher minimum benefit from \$16 to \$30, which would give an important boost to households in need and relieve pressure on food banks.

SNAP provides hungry Americans with 12 times as much food as food banks do. And with an error and fraud rate of less than 3 percent, nearly all the people who receive SNAP truly need it.

Position: We support and are grateful for the use of statewide public-private partnerships to help food banks

State-approved financial support combined with business donations help food banks respond to uniquely vulnerable groups or situational challenges.

Most recently, private businesses joined the Commonwealth of Virginia to purchase emergency food supplies for food banks during the pandemic. The move provided a boost to food banks' inventory in the wake of fewer donations from grocery stores and unsteadiness in the national food supply chain.

Position: We support equitable access to food and express concern about the Administration's rule change that may impact food-insecure neighbors from immigrant and refugee communities

Our advocacy work also includes care for neighbors across a diverse spectrum. We believe that all lives should be nourished equitably, and we seek to remove barriers that hinder access to food resources for underrepresented and marginalized groups.

BRAFB expresses concern for the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to allow the Administration to move forward with a rule that expands the definition of a public charge to include individuals who have used essential public services that support good health

and well-being, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The public charge rule can be used to threaten the immigration status of individuals legally receiving public assistance. It also creates fear and confusion—adding a stumbling block for members of immigrant communities in need of our help.

Nationwide, injunctions against the public charge regulations from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of State went into effect on Wednesday, July 29, 2020. The first of these orders prevents the implementation, application, and enforcement of the DHS rule nationwide so long as there is a declared national emergency related to the COVID-19 pandemic. But after the declaration lifts, food-insecure neighbors from immigrant communities may be in jeopardy of missing the meals they need.

About this document

This policy statement was developed by the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank and reflects shared policy priorities with Feeding America and the Federation of Virginia Food Banks. We encourage interested stakeholders to share this document with their networks.

We also welcome feedback or questions from policymakers. Please share your thoughts with Blue Ridge Area Food Bank CEO Michael McKee at mmckee@brafb.org.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

- [U.S. Senate](#)
- [U.S. House of Representatives](#)

STATE GOVERNMENT

- [Senate of Virginia](#)
- [The Virginia House of Delegates](#)

ADVOCACY PARTNERS

- [Feeding America](#)
- [Federation of Virginia Food Banks](#)

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¹Source: [Chart Book: The Legacy of the Great Recession](#). The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities|CBPP.org