



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: Due to pandemic-related job losses, food insecurity is on the rise and will likely remain at elevated levels throughout 2021.

The Food Bank and its network of partner pantries serve about 23% more people on average each month compared to the same period in the previous year—before the nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these visitors are seeking food assistance for the first time.

Last spring, the coronavirus crushed the job market—financially devastating households. The impact was swift and dramatic. The resulting workplace disruptions [fast-tracked job automation](#), meaning many of the manufacturing jobs lost in the pandemic won't return. The nation experienced this phenomenon once before—during the recovery period from the Great Recession (2007-2017)¹.

A tenuous job market will also mean more families will need food assistance over a sustained period.

Position: We support federal food and financial assistance for those economically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last spring, Congress began passing 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.

We continue to urge Congress to approve meaningful stimulus payments for vulnerable households. These funds serve as a lifeline for people who lost their livelihoods and

low-income families having trouble affording basic needs.

These federal resources have kept vulnerable households from falling into deep poverty.

Position: We support expanded SNAP benefits

We urge Congress to increase the adequacy and duration of SNAP benefits by at least 15 percent for the duration of the pandemic and economic recovery.

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.

In addition, we urge Congress to ensure Child Nutrition programs like Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) can continue serving children in need through the summer and during future school closings.

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 for food-insecure neighbors from immigrant communities who missed out on federal food resources due to the impact of a current public charge rule.

Our advocacy work includes care for neighbors across a diverse spectrum. We believe all lives should be nourished equitably, and we seek to remove barriers that hinder access to food resources for underrepresented and marginalized groups. Due to challenges in securing food assistance, immigrant populations are particularly at risk of food insecurity.

We are relieved to learn the new administration is reviewing current immigration policies, including the public charge rule that threatens an immigrant's path to citizenship if they receive SNAP benefits. According to the [Migration Policy Institute](#), the rule has led to large numbers of eligible immigrants refusing SNAP benefits for fear of jeopardizing their chances of becoming U.S. citizens.

After a 60-day review, the Biden administration will determine how to address current immigration policy. We urge the administration to reverse the public charge rule so eligible neighbors of immigrant populations can receive vital federal food resources without fear punishment. Food insecurity is a public health threat, especially during a pandemic.

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