



Aaron Michlewitz
24 Beacon St.
Room 243
Boston, MA, 02133

April 30, 2024:

Dear Chairman Michelwitz,

On behalf of The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB), I respectfully write to you in support of H4387 *An Act strengthening the Commonwealth's farms and food systems*. This omnibus bill, released by the Joint Committee on Agriculture, addresses the most pressing issues regarding resilient agriculture and food security in the Commonwealth. Particularly relevant to our mission to end hunger across Eastern Massachusetts are elements of the bill focused on bolstering food security programs that purchase from local farmers.

GBFB serves over 600,000 people in need of food across Eastern Massachusetts every month—about 70% of the state's food-insecure population. Many of our food distribution partners (food pantries, meal programs, homeless shelters, mobile markets for seniors, children, and students) are reporting more neighbors in need of food now than during the height of the pandemic, in large part due to affordability and cost of living in Massachusetts. **Families are struggling to keep food on the table, and according to our 2023 research, [one in three](#) individuals in Massachusetts are facing food insecurity.** Far too many people in the Commonwealth are grappling with the high cost of living, making tough decisions between buying nutritious food or paying for housing, healthcare, or transportation.

GBFB has a long history of partnering with and purchasing nourishing food from local food retailers, farmers and food producers—at the mutual benefit of our neighbors who receive fresh, local food, as well as our local economy. For example, the Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP) is funded through the state budget and enables the four MA food banks to purchase produce, protein and dairy, for their over 900 partners statewide. MEFAP funding accounts for 23% of GBFB's overall food

purchasing, and half of MEFAP statewide funds support food producers and farmers in the Commonwealth (48 local businesses last year). This bill would strengthen the local food system and ensure that farmers in the Bay State have equitable access to participate in business that feeds food-insecure communities across Massachusetts.

Our team works closely with retailers and farmers to accept donated food and get into the hands of those in need. GBFB plays a critical role in food waste reduction and supports efforts to maximize healthy food donations that our agency partners across Eastern MA can accept and distribute.

The state has thoughtfully spent several years studying the agriculture sector which upholds our food system and how to invest in agriculture and feed the growing number of food-insecure people. Additionally, GBFB recognizes the history of unequal opportunity for BIPOC farmers to own land and operate a thriving career. The following bills and sections within H.4387 supports a resilient, equitable, and sustainable food system that enables people to access food from the charitable food assistance network in times of need:

- S.42/H.88, An Act strengthening local food systems
- H.87/S.41. An Act promoting equity in agriculture
- H.150/S.85, An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentive program,
- H.92, Ant Act supporting the Commonwealth's food system
- S.920/H.1594, An Act encouraging the donation of food to persons in need
- Section 1: requiring MEMA to develop plans for supporting agricultural, seafood, and processed food production to mitigate the impacts of food supply chain disruptions in all emergency preparedness planning efforts.

We thank you for your consideration of these comments and respectfully ask H.4387, *An Act strengthening the Commonwealth's farms and food systems*, is reported favorably from the committee.

Sincerely,



Catherine D'Amato
President and CEO, The Greater Boston Food Bank

CC:

MA Food System Caucus Co-Chairs

Senator Jo Comerford

Senator Sal DiDomenico

Representative Andy Vargas

Representative Mindy Domb

Representative Paul Schmid

Representative Hannah Kane

Representative Daniel Donahue

Joint Committee on Agriculture Chairs

Senator Jo Comerford

Representative Paul Schmid

Representative Natalie Blais