



August 27, 2024

Dear Chair DiDomenico, Chair Decker, and members of the Massachusetts Poverty Commission:

On behalf of The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB) and our network of 600 community food providers across Eastern Massachusetts, thank you for the opportunity for us to provide this testimony. We applaud the Commission for conducting community assessments to advance their goal to address inequality, reduce poverty and promote opportunity in the Commonwealth over the next 10 years.

GBFB's recent statewide study on food equity and access, published in collaboration with Mass General Brigham, revealed that one in three individuals in Massachusetts are facing food insecurity. For these neighbors, hunger is not an emergency. It's a lived reality with a profound impact on health, wellbeing, and our social fabric. Food insecurity disproportionately impacts Hispanic, Black, Asian, and American Indian/Alaska Native households, and those with an LGBTQ+ head of household. Survey respondents reported high cost of basic needs like healthy food and housing and inadequate access to higher-paying jobs as the top barriers to food security. The charitable food system is doing everything it can to meet the demand, but additional basic needs support is critical in order to reduce food insecurity and poverty.

Despite these challenges, several programs and initiatives been successful in addressing food insecurity and poverty in Massachusetts:

MassHealth 1115 Waiver Program: This program piloted reimbursable nutrition interventions, demonstrating the benefits of integrating food access into healthcare. Expanding such initiatives can significantly improve health outcomes for food-insecure individuals.

Universal School Meals: The permanent legislation for Universal School Meals in Massachusetts ensures that all students receive free breakfast and lunch, reducing food insecurity among children and supporting their academic performance and overall well-being.

Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP): MEFAP provides quality, nutrient-dense foods to a network of 900 community food assistance programs. Ensuring adequate funding for MEFAP is crucial for sustaining these essential services.

Healthy Incentives Program (HIP): HIP allows SNAP participants to purchase fresh, local produce, thereby improving their nutrition while supporting local farmers. Expanding HIP can enhance its impact on food security and local economies.

Hunger Free Campus Initiative: This program addresses food insecurity among college students by providing resources and support across 30 public and community college campuses. With the growing number of college students, continued support for this initiative is vital for student success and retention.

Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program: This program strengthens the food system by funding infrastructure improvements for food banks and community food assistance programs. Such investments are critical for increasing the capacity and efficiency of food distribution networks.

Economic mobility programs including: Child and Family Tax Credits, cash assistance grants to families living in deep poverty, the cliff effects pilot program.

Hunger and poverty are big problems that require big solutions around housing, income, education, transportation, equity, and healthcare. However big the task, we know there are long- and short-term solutions that work and deserve sustained investment. GBFB is committed to working with state partners, policymakers, and communities to create a more equitable and food-secure Massachusetts. Thank you for your attention and for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to continuing our collaborative efforts to combat poverty and hunger in our state.

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