



# MEFAP and COVID-19

## **FY21 Budget Request: Fund Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP, DAR 2511-0105) at \$30,000,000.**

The Massachusetts Legislature is aiming to pass an FY21 Budget in late October. We are asking our Legislative champions to prioritize MEFAP.

- 1. COVID-19 Has Created a Hunger Crisis.** 1 in 7 people, or nearly one million residents, in Massachusetts is expected to face food insecurity in 2020, a 59% increase over last year. This crisis is even worse for children (1 in 5, an 81% increase) and other vulnerable populations like seniors, people with disabilities, communities of color and veterans.
- 2. Economic and Public Health Crisis** Massachusetts continues to have one of the highest unemployment rates in the country at 11.3% according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (tied for 6th). Although the unemployment rate has come down slightly, it is still nearly 4 times what it was before the pandemic began in March.
  - Among the 10 Massachusetts cities and towns with the highest unemployment rates in August, eight (Lawrence, Springfield, Brockton, Lynn, Holyoke, Chelsea, Randolph and Malden) count most of their residents as nonwhite, Hispanic or Latino. All these communities have unemployment rates higher than 15% with Lawrence struggling the most at 23%. These communities are also among the highest rates for COVID-19 cases.
- 3. Record Breaking Demand.** The four food banks have served an average of 64% more individuals this year (GBFB has seen an average of 91% more people), compared to the same time last year. We have distributed nearly 60 million meals since the outbreak of the pandemic in March; 20 million meals more than this time last year.
- 4. Implications to Emergency Food Assistance System.** Nearly 1,000 food pantries, soup kitchens, transitional shelters, and other organizations that make up the emergency food assistance system rely on MEFAP funding. These agencies are expecting MEFAP funds, and their clients rely on this food. (Ex. GBFB monthly service reports show pantries on average rely on GBFB for between 75-80% of their food. MEFAP makes up nearly X% of GBFB's overall food distribution).
- 5. Rising Food Costs.** Even before the COVID-19 crisis, Massachusetts was the most expensive state in the country in terms of the cost of a meal (\$3.63). The food budget shortfall for families has only grown as the unemployment rate and grocery prices have soared.
- 6. \$30 Million Supports Current Distribution, while Fundraising is not Sustainable.** The food banks and our partner agencies cannot meet the massive surge in need through fundraising alone. We need an increase to MEFAP that supports current distribution levels and provides consistency and stability to our ability to source food at current levels. MEFAP funding below \$30 million would require increased private funding beyond what is long-term sustainable, jeopardizing food banks ability to support need.