



The Hon. Robyn Kennedy
Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families,
and Persons with Disabilities
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

The Hon. Jay Livingstone
Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families,
and Persons with Disabilities
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

The Hon. Rebecca Rausch
Vice Chair, Joint Committee on Children,
Families, and Persons with Disabilities
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

The Hon. Jessica Giannino
Vice Chair, Joint Committee on Children,
Families, and Persons with Disabilities
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

October 12, 2023:

Re: S.76/H.135, "An Act establishing basic needs assistance for Massachusetts immigrant residents"

Dear Chair Kennedy, Vice Chair Rausch, Chair Livingstone, and Vice Chair Giannino,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of **S.76/H.135, "An Act establishing basic needs assistance for Massachusetts immigrant residents,"** sponsored by Representative Antonio Cabral and Representative Judith Garcia, on behalf of The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB).

GBFB is the largest hunger relief organization in New England and among the largest food banks in the country. GBFB distributes more than 85 million healthy meals annually through a network of nearly 600 partner agencies in 190 cities and towns across Eastern Massachusetts. Monthly, we are serving approximately 600,000 individuals, including vulnerable populations of seniors, veterans, college students, children, and families. Our SNAP outreach program assists neighbors in applying for needed nutrition benefits, and in the past year, the number of applications that GBFB has supported has doubled in response to increased need.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, GBFB has responded to a historic need in our community for hunger relief. The last annual Statewide Report on Food Insecurity, Equity, and Access led by GBFB and Mass General Brigham found that one out of three people in the Commonwealth faced food insecurity.

In response, GBFB has continued to deliver for our Eastern Massachusetts community, ramping up our food distribution efforts to ensure that all communities across our network have access to three healthy meals a day. One in seven Massachusetts residents is an immigrant, and GBFB responds to that need with an emphasis on acquiring and distributing culturally appropriate food, research into the changing needs of our neighbors, and partnerships with organizations that serve new Americans and communities of color. This year, Governor Healey declared a state of emergency due to the scale of migration to Massachusetts, and GBFB is proud to work to meet the need of all migrants. At the same time, we, like all other organizations, must stretch our resources due to the pressures of inflation and supply chain challenges.

SNAP is crucial to the Commonwealth's anti-hunger strategy, which is why GBFB maintains a SNAP outreach program. For every meal the hunger relief system provides in Massachusetts, SNAP provides five meals. SNAP benefits local economies when recipients purchase at local grocery stores and farmers' markets, and those who participate in SNAP are also eligible to participate in the Commonwealth's successful Healthy Incentives Program to expand access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

Since legally present immigrants are not eligible for nutrition benefits, they turn to organizations like GBFB and our network of partner pantries. While GBFB is proud to lead efforts to combat food insecurity across demographic groups, the emergency relief system in our Commonwealth is spread thin. Solutions must meet the root causes of the challenge. Our mission is to End Hunger Here, and ending hunger here includes restoring needed nutrition benefits to legally present immigrants.

Those who will receive support through this bill are often fleeing violence, seeking asylum, and looking forward to contributing to the Commonwealth. They may not remember any home other than Massachusetts. They attend Massachusetts schools, perform essential work in our Massachusetts industries, and contribute to Massachusetts civic life. However, despite navigating the complex immigration process, they are excluded from the same benefits their neighbors receive – meaning that they also end up in Massachusetts homeless shelters and receive food at Massachusetts food pantries. Seeking safety away from their home countries should not resign immigrants to hunger here.

We urge the committee to favorably report out S.76/H.135. We hope that Massachusetts joins Maine, Connecticut, and four other states in ensuring neighbors can access food regardless of citizenship status. Restoring benefits to legally present immigrants will help us to achieve our mission to end hunger here in Eastern Massachusetts.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Catherine D'Amato
President and CEO

The Greater Boston Food Bank