



Chair Jason Lewis  
24 Beacon St.  
Room 511-B  
Boston, MA, 02133

Chair Denise Garlick  
24 Beacon St.  
Room 473G  
Boston, MA, 02133

July 17, 2023

**RE: EDUCATION COMMITTEE TESTIMONY - H.603/S.261**

Dear Chairs Garlick and Lewis, and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity for The Greater Boston Food Bank to submit testimony in support of making Universal School Meals permanent.

GBFB is the largest hunger relief organization in New England and among the largest food banks in the country. GBFB distributes more than 96 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.

Earlier this month, GBFB published the results of a study conducted in collaboration with Mass General Brigham Hospital, entitled, [Opportunities to Improve Food Equity and Access in Massachusetts](#), which found that an astounding 1 in 3 people faced hunger in 2022, a statistic consistent with hunger in the Commonwealth during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, over 1 in 5 households with children in Massachusetts are struggling to put food on the table. Access to nourishing meals for kids at school relieves a great burden for many working families whose budgets are already stretched thin.

Due to overlapping emergencies (inflation, labor, supply chain, decreased fundraising), GBFB is under significant pressure to respond to the historic demand for food. As a food assistance provider, our role is to fill in the gaps to ensure that our neighbors have reliable and equitable access to nutritious food. However, all forms of assistance need to be supporting and operating optimally to end hunger in our Commonwealth. While

even the pre-pandemic rates of food insecurity were unacceptable, we know that historic investments in federal nutrition programs during the pandemic, such as universal school meals, Pandemic EBT (P-EBT), and SNAP benefit increases, allowed food assistance providers to stymie the tidal wave of need.

GBFB has a history of supporting access to school meals. As the founders of and driving force behind the Rise and Shine MA coalition that led on the passage of Breakfast After the Bell and increased access to breakfast for low-income children, we know that **bold policy action is needed to address the root causes of food insecurity and ensure consistent access to nutrition**. Passing School Meals for All would build upon these successes and help us reach our mission to end hunger here.

Massachusetts is a leader in ensuring residents have access to basic needs, and the Legislature deserves much of that credit. We now ask the Legislature to make School Meals for All permanent to ensure that children can thrive at school and families have the necessary support now and into the future.

We urge the legislature to pass **H.603/S.261**. Ending hunger in Massachusetts starts with feeding our youngest and most vulnerable.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Catherine D'Amato". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

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