



The Hon. Cindy Friedman
Chair, Joint Committee on Health Care
Financing
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

The Hon. John J. Lawn, Jr.
Chair, Joint Committee on Health Care
Financing
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

The Hon. John J. Cronin
Vice Chair, Joint Committee on Health Care
Financing
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

The Hon. Kathleen R. LaNatra
Vice Chair, Joint Committee on Health
Care Financing
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

January 25, 2024:

Re: H. 1250, An Act to Advance Health Equity

Dear Chair Friedman, Chair Lawn, Vice Chair Cronin, and Vice Chair LaNatra:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB) in support of H.1250, An Act to Advance Health Equity, introduced by Representatives Bud Williams and Judith Garcia.

GBFB knows all too well that access to health and nutrition are not equitable across different communities in our state. It is concerning enough that **one in three of our neighbors is facing food insecurity**, yet our 2023 annual statewide report on [Food Equity and Access](#), authored in collaboration with Mass General Brigham Hospital, reveals staggering inequities among racial/ethnic groups, with 50% of Black households and 61% of Latino households facing food insecurity. Our research, in partnership with Dr. Lauren Fiechtner of Mass General Brigham, provides key insights on the impacts of food insecurity on our state's health, and we utilize this data to inform how we fulfill our vision of removing barriers and creating equitable access to food.

GBFB is the largest hunger relief organization in New England and among the largest food banks in the country. GBFB distributes nearly 90 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, twice as many as during pre-pandemic years, including vulnerable populations of seniors, veterans, college students, children, people with disabilities or chronic health issues, 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. Our work across Eastern Massachusetts increases access to nutritious food at a time when inflation and supply chain challenges are making healthy food increasingly less affordable for our Commonwealth's most vulnerable.

GBFB envisions a healthy Eastern Massachusetts in all that we do, and we believe that healthy food is a human right. GBFB partnered with Boston Medical Center to support the first hospital-based therapeutic food pantry in the country and today we have more than 8 community health center mobile markets and several hospital-based partners – most recently at MGH Revere Mobile Market and Boston Children’s Hospital. Driven by our organizational Nutrition Policy, our team of Registered Dietitians ensures that 95% of the food that GBFB distributes meets rigorous nutritional standards. There are, nevertheless, significant barriers to health equity in our increasingly unaffordable state. In 2022, we found among populations receiving SNAP benefits and utilizing food pantries, anxiety and depression rates were nearly double the rate of the rest of the state. That is why GBFB has a SNAP Outreach Team that helps over 1,000 households access their benefits yearly. Healthcare providers are recognizing the risk that food insecurity poses to public health. According to our report, 83% of Massachusetts residents screened for food insecurity and offered food security resources utilized them. We know that the health of our community depends on their food security, and we work to promote culturally responsive and healthy foods across Eastern Massachusetts, especially among populations disproportionately impacted by food insecurity due to their race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and geographic residence.

Because of our commitment to supporting the health of Eastern Massachusetts, we are honored to champion An Act to Advance Health Equity. The scope of this bill is wide-ranging, recognizing that health inequities are both a cause of and a symptom of other inequities. This bill supports the provision of health equity data that help organizations like GBFB better identify how, in our own programmatic strategy and in our collaboration with the Commonwealth, we can advance equitable food access through the proposed Executive Office of Equity and standardized data practices. At the same time, this Act provides a framework for immediate basic needs relief for our neighbors, including the expansion of MassHealth benefits to all, regardless of citizenship status. GBFB was a proud supporter of the Feed Our Neighbors campaign to restore SNAP benefits to legally present immigrants, and we will continue to advocate for our neighbors in need. For relief today and systemic, transformative changes tomorrow, that put power in the hands of our neighbors facing inequities, we urge you to pass An Act to Advance Health Equity.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



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