



Senate President Karen Spilka  
Chairman Michael Rodrigues  
Vice Chairwoman Cindy Friedman

Speaker Ronald Mariano  
Chairman Aaron Michlewitz  
Vice Chairwoman Ann-Margaret  
Ferrante

February 23, 2024:

Dear Madam President Spilka, Speaker Mariano, and members of Ways and Means leadership,

Thank you for your dedication to making Massachusetts a more affordable and equitable state. The FY24 budget made groundbreaking investments in food security initiatives, among many basic needs services, and we are grateful that our state's leadership understands the scale of food insecurity and recognizes that we have the power to end hunger in our Commonwealth. In advance of FY25 budget deliberations, we are writing to share our **hunger and poverty-relief budget priorities on behalf of The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB) and our 600 partner agencies** that feed people across Eastern Massachusetts every day.

**Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP, line-item DAR 2511-0105) FY5 Request: \$47M**

MEFAP provides critical funding to the four Massachusetts food banks—The Merrimack Valley Food Bank, The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, the Worcester County Food Bank, and GBFB—enabling a consistent supply of healthy food to be distributed to families in need across the 850 community partners we serve statewide. **MEFAP enables us to provide food to every district across the Commonwealth.** On average, GBFB's food pantry partners receive nearly 80% of the food they distribute from GBFB, which is purchased by our team and almost entirely provided at no cost to our partners.

Rising prices and supply chain challenges make it harder for each dollar to go as far as it has in the past—supermarket prices are now [25% higher than in January 2020](#)—challenging shoppers as well as GBFB's food purchasing team. Despite this, our network of food distribution agencies **distributed twice as much food last year as before the pandemic**. At the same time, GBFB's network experienced **an additional 12% increase in need over our FY23**. This is comparable to what our sister food banks are experiencing across the state: the Food Bank of Western MA saw an increase of 15% in the number of visits per month to their agency partners from FY22 to FY23, the Worcester County Food Bank saw an increase of 33% in the number of individuals and families seeking food assistance over the same timeframe, and Merrimack Valley Food Bank is experiencing similar trends.

Not only is MEFAP a critical lifeline for food pantries feeding people in every city and town in Massachusetts, MEFAP stimulates our local agricultural and food manufacturing economy: **more than half of all MEFAP dollars were spent with MA-based suppliers last year**.

Additionally, we ask that you consider these additional hunger and poverty-relief budget priorities:

- **The Hunger Free Campus Initiative: \$2M** – These funds enable the MA Department of Higher Education to back hunger-relief projects that boost student success and bolster our future workforce. Past funding has impacted an estimated 50,000 community college and public university students, but campus basic needs programs can't keep up with the influx of new students. GBFB co-leads the statewide coalition advancing this Initiative.
- **School Meals for All** – Research shows that hungry students can't learn. We are grateful to the legislature for making this program permanent, and we urge full funding so every child can count on nutritious meals during the school day.
- **Food Security Infrastructure Grant (FSIG) program: \$25M** – Aimed at increasing equitable access to locally sourced food and supporting projects that promote resilience and connectivity throughout the Massachusetts food system, the FSIG program is critical to the infrastructure that allows our 600 partners across Eastern Massachusetts to feed those in need.
- **Healthy Incentives Program (HIP): \$25M** – Every dollar invested in this nutrition program for SNAP participants means dollars saved in avoidable healthcare costs, supporting local growers, and more food on the tables of low-income neighbors.
- **Nutrition benefits for legally present immigrants: \$12M-\$18M** – These funds restore much-needed nutrition benefits for legally-present immigrant families in MA. Many are essential workers and the backbone of our economy, but can't make ends meet.

- **Cash assistance grants** – GBFB supports improving the health and well-being of Massachusetts children and families by raising cash assistance grants for children in deep poverty, many of whom are served by our agency partners.

We recognize that this year will be a uniquely challenging fiscal climate. However, we know that when the economy takes a hit, it is felt hardest by our lowest-income neighbors. We are deeply appreciative of your recognition that bold investments are required to tackle the persistent issues of hunger and poverty.

Sincerely,

*Catherine D'Amato*

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President and CEO

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*Kate Adams*

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