



2022 Policy Agenda

Updated 1-5-2021

The Food Depository firmly believes that we cannot end hunger without addressing the root causes of poverty and racial inequity. Further, we cannot advance solutions to hunger without engaging the individuals and communities most impacted by food insecurity. We are committed to advancing policy solutions that promote equitable food access and that place nutrition program clients at the center of our work.

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically increased the need for food assistance across Illinois while also highlighting the long-standing structural inequities that have for generations caused food insecurity. Before the pandemic, nearly 2 million Illinoisans already relied on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to meet their nutritional needs. At the height of the COVID-19 crisis, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) reported a 280 percent increase in new requests for SNAP statewide, and the Greater Chicago Food Depository served 2.5 times as many individuals as before COVID. Historic increases in inflation, particularly in key areas like food prices, rent, and home heating, will further destabilize vulnerable communities as the economic crisis continues to develop. Evidence from the Great Recession shows that low-income families continue to feel the impact of economic recessions for years after the peak of a crisis.

In addition to creating a sharp increase in hunger, the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the ways our country's deep-seated racial inequities permeate Illinois. Both the health and economic impacts of this pandemic disproportionately impact communities of color. Despite only comprising about 14% of the population of Illinois, by April 2020, Black people comprised 41 percent of all COVID-19 deaths in the state. Across the United States, Indigenous people were 3.3 times and Latino people 2.4 times more likely to die of COVID-19 compared to white people. Growing nationwide protests against systemic racial discrimination, building on the multi-generational work of civil rights activists, has brought the fight for racial equity to the forefront of the Food Depository's work.

In 2022, the Food Depository is advocating for the food, funds, and flexibility needed to allow Illinois's emergency food network and state and local agencies to respond effectively to the increased need for food assistance. At the same time, we are also working to advance policy changes that build our state's food assistance system better than it was before the pandemic by better connecting individuals to food and nutrition programs and supporting equitable food access.

The following specific and actionable policy recommendations at the federal, state, and local level will support both short-term recovery and long-term resilience.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Federal

- **Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act:** Better connect food insecure children to nutrition assistance by expanding access and flexibility in summer meal programs; improving benefit adequacy and extending certification periods in WIC; and streamline administrative processes to make it easier for schools to provide eligible children with free school meals. [Learn more.](#)
- **Build Back Better Act:** Include investments to help end child hunger, including making permanent the Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (Summer-EBT) program to provide low-income children with a grocery debit card in the summer, expanding the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to make it easier for low-income schools to provide free meals, and expanding the Child Tax Credit (CTC).
- **Medically Tailored Home-Delivered Meals Demonstration Pilot Act:** Enact legislation that would help medically vulnerable seniors and people with disabilities get access to medically tailored meals in their homes.
- **Budget:** Provide robust funding for discretionary nutrition programs including the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, The Emergency Food Assistance Program, Commodity Supplemental Food Program, and Older Americans Act congregate and home-delivered meal programs.



2022 Policy Agenda

Updated 1-5-2021

State

- **Breakfast After the Bell:** Enact legislation to provide start up funds and other incentives to encourage schools serving a large number of low-income students to operate Breakfast After the Bell models that make it easier for children to access school breakfast.
- **Food System:** Support legislation that transforms Illinois's food system to support the purchase of healthy foods that are sustainably, locally, and equitably sourced, including eliminating the low-cost bid requirement in child nutrition program procurement, funding the Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund, and supporting the Good Food Purchasing Policy Task Force.
- **Budget:** Advocate for ARPA dollars to support medically tailored meals

ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER PRIORITIES

State

- **Interagency:** Collaborate across ISBE, DHS, and Aging and community-based organizations to better-inform consumers of what nutrition programs are available, who is eligible, and how to enroll.
- **Illinois Department of Human Services:**
 - Leverage e-mail and texting platforms to facilitate communication with SNAP and WIC clients.
 - Allow community-based organizations (CBOs) to capture telephonic or electronic signatures in SNAP application processing.
 - Secure the Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP) waiver to streamline SNAP enrollment for older adults and people with disabilities.
 - Update SNAP application and case management online platforms to be mobile-friendly.
 - Expand retailer participation in SNAP online.
 - Ensure robust implementation of SNAP Restaurant Meals Program Pilot.
 - Update WIC platform to allow for secure document upload.
 - Add WIC to state online Application for Benefits Eligibility.
- **Illinois State Board of Education:**
 - Develop statewide online application for school breakfast and lunch.
 - Encourage more schools to operate Breakfast After The Bell programs.
- **Illinois Department on Aging:** Amend the Medicaid 1915(c) HCBS waiver to reimburse for home-delivered meals to older adults.

Local

- **WIC Agencies:** Work in 3 priority neighborhoods to coordinate WIC services and outreach, including mobile enrollment.
- **Chicago Parks District and Chicago Public Libraries:** Expedite health and fire inspection process for community-based organizations sponsoring afterschool meals programs.
- **City Departments and Community Based Organizations:**
 - Expand retailer participation in SNAP online with a focus on south and west sides.
 - Encourage restaurant participation in SNAP Restaurant Meals Program Pilot and promote awareness of the new program option among eligible SNAP households.
 - Leverage city communication channels to inform residents about what nutrition programs are available, who is eligible, and how to enroll.
 - Support efforts to transform Chicago's food system to be more equitable by leveraging institutional procurement to support local producers; reducing barriers to urban agriculture; and supporting BIPOC food businesses, especially with access to capital.

For more information, please contact Ashley Munson, Senior Manager of Advocacy, at amunson@gcfd.org