



2025 Policy and Advocacy Agenda

January 2025

The Greater Chicago Food Depository firmly believes that hunger is a policy choice. To build a movement to end hunger, we must collaborate with a cross-section of partners and neighbors most impacted by food insecurity and poverty to drive policy and systems change.

Our collective work to ensure neighbors have the food they need to thrive is more urgent now than ever before. Food insecurity in Chicago and Cook County remains elevated, and many families continue to find it hard to put food on the table. As of September 2024, 1 in 5 households overall (20%) and 1 in 4 households with children (24%) living in the Chicago Metropolitan Area are experiencing food insecurity.

Black and Latinx households face higher rates of food insecurity (33% and 30%, respectively) than White households and the average overall (14% and 20%, respectively) in the Chicago Metro Area.¹

To respond to our current moment and advance our mission to end hunger, the Food Depository is advocating for the following policy recommendations at the federal, state, and local levels. **This list is subject to change as opportunities for advocacy arise throughout the year.** If you are working on an aligned policy campaign or project which is not described below, please reach out to us (slarrimore@gcfd.org)!

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Federal

- **Protect SNAP and TEFAP (Farm Bill):** Pass a strong Farm Bill that has no cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and includes the following priority marker bills: the Farmers Feeding America Act (H.R. 6203/S. 2713 in the 118th Congress), which would strengthen TEFAP; the Hot Foods Act (H.R. 3519/S. 2258 in the 118th Congress), which would remove the prohibition on buying hot prepared food at the grocery store with SNAP benefits; the Enhance Access to SNAP (EATS) Act (H.R. 3183/S. 1488 in the 118th Congress), which would make more college students eligible for SNAP; and the Expanding Access To (EAT) Local Foods Act (S. 3982 in the 118th Congress), which would continue the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program (LFPA).
 - Push back on efforts to reduce the value of benefits, impose work requirements and time limits, restrict choice in the foods families can purchase with SNAP benefits, and institute more barriers to accessing SNAP.
- **Protect WIC:** Resist efforts to cut funding, reduce the value of benefits, restrict eligibility, and require state funding match for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program. Advocate for full funding through annual appropriations and for program improvements to increase participation during the next Child Nutrition Reauthorization (see below).

¹ Dr. Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach analysis and prediction of food insecurity levels using the December Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey and U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey food sufficiency responses for the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin region, Apr 23, 2020 – Sept 16, 2024.



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- **Advance other appropriations priorities:** Provide robust funding for discretionary nutrition programs including The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) administrative funding for storage and distribution of food within the emergency food system, Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), and congregate and home-delivered meal programs authorized through the Older Americans Act. Restore SNAP benefit replacement for victims of EBT card skimming.
- **Protect school and summer meals for children:** Advocate against any proposals to restrict or eliminate the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which allows high-poverty schools/districts to offer free meals to all students. Resist efforts to cut funding for school and summer meals and eliminate summer meal programs for students not attending summer school. Ensure continued implementation support and flexibility for Summer EBT, which provides \$120 per eligible child to bridge the summer meal gap.
- **Advocate for improvements in the next Child Nutrition Reauthorization:** Once reauthorization negotiations begin, advocate to better connect food insecure children to nutrition assistance through the following priority marker bills:
 - **WIC:** The MODERN WIC Act (H.R. 2424/S. 984 in the 118th Congress) to require remote certification; the Wise Investment in Children (WIC) Act (H.R. 3364/S. 1604 in the 118th Congress), ensuring children can stay on WIC until age 6; and the Extending WIC for New Moms Act (H.R. 3332/S. 1593 in the 118th Congress), which allows states to extend the certification period for breastfeeding and postpartum women to 2 years.
 - **School and Summer Meals:** The School Meals Expansion Act (H.R. 2567 in the 118th Congress), which increases funding for CEP schools serving free meals to all students; the School Hunger Elimination Act (H.R. 9448/S. 4525 in the 118th Congress), which expands and simplifies Medicaid direct certification to automatically connect more children to free school meals; the Expanding Access to School Meals Act (H.R. 3113 in the 118th Congress) to eliminate the reduced price meal category; the Summer Meals and Learning Act (H.R. 9406/S. 4876 in the 118th Congress), which aligns the eligibility threshold of summer meals with school meals and introduces a year-round meal service option to allow for meal service during school breaks; and the Stop Child Hunger Act (H.R. 4379 in the 118th Congress) to expand the Summer EBT program.
- **Protect other public benefits programs:** Protect critical health, human services and public benefit programs—including Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program, the Affordable Care Act, Supplemental Security Income, and housing assistance—from dangerous proposals to restrict eligibility, reduce benefits, or convert federal programs into state block grants.
- **Expand the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC):** Increase the amount of the CTC by, at a minimum, reinstating the temporary expansion through the American Rescue Plan in 2021. Make the CTC fully available for all low- and middle-income families and accelerate the phase-in for the EITC. Expand the EITC for workers who don’t claim dependents.



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- **Champion efforts to address and reimburse for Health-Related Social Needs (HRSNs) and advance Food Is Medicine (FIM) initiatives:** Protect Medicaid and Medicare’s ability to innovate and address the HRSNs of enrollees like food and nutrition security through demonstration waivers and more. Enact legislation that would help medically vulnerable seniors, people with disabilities, and people with chronic diseases get access to medically tailored groceries and meals in their homes, including the Medically Tailored Home-Delivered Meals Demonstration Pilot Act (H.R. 6780/S. 2133 in the 118th Congress) and the Fueling Optimal Outcomes through Diet (FOOD) for Health Act (H.R. 10124 in the 118th Congress).
- **Challenge deportations and city or state funding cuts:** Monitor and work with other organizations to advocate against any policies that will result in the deportation of undocumented immigrants and significantly reduce funding for the City of Chicago and State of Illinois due to our sanctuary city and state policies.

State

- **Increase the SNAP Minimum Benefit in Illinois:** Raise the minimum benefit for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) from the federal floor of \$23 per month to \$75 per month using state funds. This increase would provide essential support for low-income residents, enhance food security, and stimulate local economies.
- **Expand SNAP Eligibility for college students:** Make all students at public colleges and universities eligible for SNAP, as long as they meet the income requirements. Federal rules prohibit college students from receiving SNAP unless they qualify for an exemption, such as working 20 hours a week or having a child. States have broad discretion to exempt more students if their educational program increases job-readiness.
- **Implement and sustainably fund the Illinois Farm to Food Bank Program:** Continue implementing Farm to Food Bank across the state and secure continued funding of \$2.5 million in the FY26 budget. Signed into law in 2023, the Illinois Farm to Food Bank Program connects food banks directly with Illinois farmers to increase the supply of nutritious, locally-grown food for Illinoisans experiencing food insecurity.
- **Restore cash and food assistance for asylum seekers:** In 2018, the Illinois General Assembly and Governor created programs to provide critical, time-limited medical, food and cash assistance to immigrant victims of trafficking, torture and other serious crimes (VTTC) and their children who are ineligible for federal benefits and highly vulnerable to further exploitation and harm. In 2024, the General Assembly made significant changes to VTTC food and cash assistance eligibility which has made many families ineligible, particularly those planning to apply for asylum who have not yet filed. We will advocate alongside partners to reverse prior cuts to this important program.



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- **Strengthen statewide school meals funding:** Support partner efforts to strengthen state funding for critical child nutrition programs like school meals, particularly ensuring that all low-income students have access to free school meals.
- **Advance food system equity and innovations:** Support legislation that transforms Illinois' food system to support the purchase of healthy foods that are sustainably, locally, and equitably sourced, including funding the Local Food Infrastructure Grant program and the Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund.
- Support partner advocacy efforts to address the **root causes of hunger** – including poverty, systemic inequity and structural racism.
 - **Illinois Time to Care Coalition and Raising Illinois:** Advocate for a state-run insurance program that will allow Illinois workers to use up to 26 weeks of paid, job-protected leave a year for serious illness, pregnancy, school closures, caring for a family member, and more.
 - **Cost of Living Refund Coalition:** Advocate for improvements to the new Illinois Child Tax Credit to better serve the lowest-income households in the state, and for a statewide fund to support local guaranteed income demonstrations statewide to promote economic security.
 - **Responsible Budget Coalition:** Advocate for a state budget that contains adequate revenue which is fairly raised and avoids cuts to vital programs and services.
 - Advocate alongside partners for affordable housing and public transportation solutions, policies to advance child and elder care affordability, remove barriers to opportunity for returning residents, and more.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND OTHER PRIORITIES

Federal

- Monitor and inform advocates about opportunities to push back on efforts to restrict or weaken nutrition programs through executive action and federal rulemaking, including opportunities to submit public comments.
- **Advocate against changes to public charge:** Push back on efforts to broaden the list of public benefit programs that would be considered evidence that someone is likely to become a “public charge” and should be denied admission into the U.S. or adjustment of immigration status. Public charge changes under the prior Trump administration had a chilling effect on public benefits participation for mixed-status and non-citizen households for programs like SNAP, WIC, and more.

State

- **Interagency:** Collaborate across the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Illinois State Board of Education, the Illinois Department on Aging and community-based organizations to better inform consumers of what nutrition programs are available, who is eligible, and how to enroll.



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- **Illinois Commission to End Hunger (ICTEH):** ICTEH is currently focused on advancing opportunities to better connect children to the nutrition they need to thrive through access to programs like Summer EBT, school breakfast, and the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). Among other priorities, in 2025 ICTEH will lead a statewide awareness campaign around the new Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program with special focus on youth who face unique access barriers, including children in Community Eligibility Provision schools, homeless youth, and children in mixed immigration status households. The Commission will also advance strategies to increase enrollment and retention in other nutrition programs, especially earlier enrollment of pregnant women and longer retention of young children in WIC and increased enrollment of mixed immigration status households in SNAP. Lastly the Commission will support efforts to expand implementation of the rural non-congregate option in the Summer Food Service Program to increase access to summer meals for families in rural areas.
- **Illinois Department of Human Services:**
 - Allow community-based organizations (CBOs) to better assist neighbors with SNAP applications over the phone by accepting telephonic signatures.
 - Expand retailer participation in and customer awareness of the SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot, which allows families to conveniently shop online with their SNAP benefits for grocery pickup or delivery.
 - Support statewide expansion of the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program, which allows seniors, people with disabilities, and individuals experiencing homelessness to use their SNAP benefits at participating restaurants, with corresponding state-led equity-focused outreach and awareness efforts to reach local restaurants and neighbors statewide.
 - Continue implementation of Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Program with strong neighbor-centered eligibility and enrollment processes and supports.
 - Reduce burden on older adults and distribution sites in the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) by eliminating identification and signature requirements at each food box distribution.
- **Illinois State Board of Education:**
 - Develop statewide online application for school breakfast and lunch.
 - Implement and evaluate the Breakfast After the Bell grant program 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.
 - Support state school meal policy changes to make more meals free and increase program uptake



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- Maximize implementation of Summer EBT and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) rural non-congregate to connect more families with summer food.
- **Illinois Department on Aging:**
 - Support the development of a Multi-Sector Plan for Aging that incorporates recommendations to address food insecurity among older adults.
- **Illinois Healthcare and Family Services:**
 - Support robust implementation of the Medicaid 1115 waiver, *Illinois Healthcare Transformation*, and contract rebid process of HealthChoice Illinois (the state's Medicaid managed care program) to advance reimbursement for health-related social needs services like food and nutrition and better connect neighbors with SNAP and WIC.

Local

- **WIC Agencies:** Collaborate with the Greater Chicago Food Depository for focused efforts in three priority neighborhoods to coordinate WIC services and outreach, including mobile enrollment.
- **City Departments and Community Based Organizations (via the Mayor's [Food Equity Council](#) - Emergency Food and Federal Nutrition Programs Work Group):**
 - Coordinate advocacy to respond to Federal-level proposals for nutrition benefits.
 - Leverage City communication channels to inform Chicagoans about emergency food access and nutrition programs.
 - Increase WIC awareness and enrollment through multiple pilots.
 - Strengthen participation in Chicago summer meals programs, Summer EBT and school breakfast programs.
 - Support efforts of other Food Equity Council work groups to transform Chicago's food system to be more equitable by leveraging institutional procurement to support local producers; reducing barriers to urban agriculture and local food retail; and supporting BIPOC-owned food businesses, especially with access to capital.
- **Build a movement of local organizations and individual residents committed to ending hunger** – grow our community of advocates advancing federal, state and local policy change.

See something missing that can help end hunger in Cook County? Is your organization working on a bill that will address the root causes of hunger and poverty? **We would love to hear your feedback and ideas on how to continuously refine our policy priorities and support your work.** For more information, please contact Skyler Larrimore, interim vice president of policy and advocacy, at slarrimore@gcfd.org.