



THE GENERAL COURT OF MASSACHUSETTS
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

October 19, 2020

The Honorable Charles Baker
Governor of the Commonwealth Massachusetts
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker,

Thank you for your continued efforts to mitigate the coronavirus and address the many issues that have stemmed from the pandemic. We appreciate the work that you have done to support our most vulnerable populations and in particular to address a dramatic increase in food insecurity that we face. We are especially grateful for your administration's COVID-19 Food Security Task Force, which launched many new initiatives, including quickly delivering federal Pandemic EBT benefits to needy school age children, pursuing the USDA SNAP online purchasing pilot, and providing a \$36 million Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program.

As you may know, over the last few years, we have worked with your administration, in particular Secretary Sudders, to close the "SNAP Gap" to try to allow people to apply for SNAP at the same time that they apply for other means-tested benefits.

On August 7, 2020, you approved Chapter 151 of the Acts of 2020, *An Act financing the general governmental infrastructure of the Commonwealth*. Section 2, Line Item 4000-0123 allocates \$5 million for the capital costs associated with developing a system that allows health care consumers to apply for SNAP benefits when seeking MassHealth or the Medicare Savings program benefits. We write to you today to urge you to use this \$5 million as soon as you can in order to help reach everyone who needs food assistance during this time.

You are aware that food insecurity has exponentially increased since March. According to Project Bread, due to record unemployment, lost wages, and many having little-to-no savings to protect them from the economic impact of COVID-19, food insecurity has skyrocketed from

8.4% of households, to 16.6% of households as of July 2020. Over the last six months, the four Massachusetts food banks, serving about 1,000 partners across the state, have seen an average increase of 64% more clients seeking food assistance. Not only that, data confirms that twice as many Black and Latinx households with children were feeling the impacts of food insecurity compared to white households.

We need this system to be developed now more than ever. This new system would help break down barriers to allow those in need of food assistance and help thousands of low income Massachusetts households purchase the food they need for their families as they continue to try to recover from the ongoing pandemic. Maximizing SNAP enrollment would also trigger a significant economic stimulus to the local economy, as it did in the last Recession. Further, implementing systems changes *quickly* means all eligible households will receive the maximum SNAP benefit that Congress authorized under the federal Families First Act and for as long as the federal public health declaration is in effect (recently extended through January 2021.)

We thank you for your consideration. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this issue.

Sincerely,

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Middlesex and Suffolk District

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8th Suffolk District

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Cc: MaryLou Sudders, Secretary, Health and Human Services
Amy Kershaw, Commissioner of Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance