

# It's Time to Close the **SNAP**Gap

Reduce Hunger. Improve Health. Support the Economy.

October 26, 2020

The Honorable Charles D. Baker  
Governor of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Massachusetts State House  
Office of the Governor, Room 280  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Baker:

We, the undersigned anti-poverty, anti-hunger, and food justice organizations in Massachusetts, wish to thank you for establishing a COVID-19 Food Security Task Force in April, and for your strong leadership to improve the health, safety and food security of low-income Massachusetts residents during this unprecedented pandemic. We write to urge the Administration to implement a provision included in Section 2 of Chapter 151 of the Acts of 2020, An Act financing the general governmental infrastructure of the Commonwealth. In July, the Massachusetts Legislature authorized the Administration to finance \$5 million dollars (line item 4000-0123) for the purpose of developing a system to allow health care consumers to apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits at the same time. As the COVID-19 pandemic persists and the economic Recession deepens, we urge the Administration to use this financing to implement this systems change as quickly as possible.

Allowing health care consumers to apply for SNAP at the same time as they apply for or renew their MassHealth or Medicare Savings Program coverage has the potential to bring substantial federal nutrition dollars to needy residents, reduce health care costs and provide much needed economic stimulus. In December of 2019, EOHHS identified nearly 700,000 low-income residents receiving MassHealth but not SNAP benefits. Were Massachusetts to efficiently enroll even half (350K) of these residents in SNAP benefits, this could bring \$50 to \$60M per month in federal nutrition dollars into the Commonwealth. Developing this systems change is directly related to the state's COVID-19 response efforts:

- Boosting SNAP enrollment during the public health emergency means more households will qualify for the COVID-19 SNAP Emergency Allotment for each month where we have both a state and federal public health emergency declaration. This extra SNAP is especially important for many older adults and persons with disabilities who may only receive \$16/month in SNAP but now receive \$204/month, as well as for working households getting lower SNAP.
- Boosting SNAP enrollment creates automatic free school meal status for thousands more K-12 students, increases the ability of more school districts to qualify for the

federal universal free school meal (CEP) policy, and qualifies more students for Pandemic EBT benefits.

We sincerely appreciate the efforts by the Department of Transitional Assistance and Office of MassHealth to address the “SNAP Gap” including adding a short SNAP paper application to the MassHealth Senior application and deploying available staff at the MassHealth Enrollment Centers to phone call MassHealth recipients and offer to take a SNAP application. However, these two efforts have resulted in roughly 1,200 SNAP applications since March. Meanwhile, federal Medicaid.gov data from January through June 2020 shows that approximately 12,000 to 20,000 Medicaid applications are filed each month in the Commonwealth. We firmly believe that the best time to enroll individuals and families in the SNAP program is when they are affirmatively applying for or renewing their health care and can give their eligibility information for both programs at the same time.

The Governor’s COVID-19 Food Security Task Force has prioritized maximizing federal nutrition benefits to address food security needs in Massachusetts. Emergency food provided by food banks and food pantries cannot begin to meet this need. Nor does emergency food allow families the discretion to purchase the foods that meet their families’ diets and preferences. The most efficient, comprehensive route to maximize access to federal nutrition benefits to invest in the systems changes authorized by Chapter 151 of the Acts of 2000 and maximize the opportunity for SNAP enrollment.

Sincerely,

AARP Massachusetts  
Abby’s House  
About Fresh  
Action for Boston Community Development,  
Inc. (ABCD)  
Action Inc.  
Allston Brighton Health Collaborative  
American Red Cross of Massachusetts Bay  
Amherst Survival Center  
ARISE for Social Justice  
Atrius Health  
Backyard Growers  
Baystate Health, Bay Path, MACHW and  
CTC Ma contact tracking team  
Beverly Bootstraps  
Boston Area Rape Crisis Center  
Boston Children’s Hospital  
Boston Public Health Commission  
Brigham and Women’s Faulkner Hospital  
Cambridge Economic Opportunity

Committee  
Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation  
Central West Justice Center  
Children’s HealthWatch  
CISA (Community involved in Sustaining  
Agriculture)  
City of Boston  
City of Somerville  
Coalition for a Better Acre  
Coalition for a Healthy Greater Worcester  
Coalition for Social Justice  
Commonwealth Care Alliance  
Community Action Pioneer Valley  
Community Health Network for North  
Central Mass  
Community Servings  
Disability Policy Consortium  
DotHouse Health  
DOVE (DOMestic Violence Ended), Inc.  
Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath)

Eliot Community Human Services  
Fenway Health  
Food For Free  
Greater Boston Legal Services  
Groundwork Lawrence  
Health Care For All  
Health Law Advocates  
Health Leads  
Helping Our Women  
HomeStart, Inc.  
Island Grown Initiative  
Jewish Family & Children's Service  
Justice Center of Southeast MA  
Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry  
Lowell Alliance  
Mass Home Care  
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless  
Massachusetts Councils on Aging  
Massachusetts Food System Collaborative  
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute  
Massachusetts Public Health Association  
Massachusetts Senior Action Council  
Merrimack Valley Food Bank, Inc  
Metropolitan Area Planning Council  
Mill City Grows  
National Association of Social Workers - MA  
Chapter  
Northampton Senior Services

Northeast Justice Center  
Operation ABLE of Greater Boston, Inc.  
Parenting Journey  
Pembroke Public Schools  
Pleasant Street Neighborhood Network  
Center  
Project Bread  
Rosie's Place  
Seven Hills Foundation  
Sodexo  
Somerville Homeless Coalition (Project SOUP)  
Springfield Dementia Friendly Coalition  
Springfield Partners for Community Action, Inc.  
St. Anthony's Pantry  
Sustainable CAPE - Center for Agricultural  
Preservation & Education  
Temple Sinai of Sharon  
The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts  
The Food Project, Inc.  
The Greater Boston Food Bank  
The Open Door  
Tufts Friedman Food Policy Action Council  
UMass Memorial Health Care  
UMass Memorial Medical Center  
Veterans Legal Services  
WHEAT Community Connections  
Worcester Community Action Council  
Worcester County Food Bank, Inc.

Cc: MaryLou Sudders, Secretary, Health and Human Services  
COVID-19 Food Security Task Force