



## 2020 Advocacy Agenda



Northern Illinois Food Bank is a leader of hunger relief in our 13-county service area and a critical partner in providing nutritious meals and groceries to those in need, having provided nearly 66 million meals last year. By participating in key legislation discussions, we are able to give a voice to not only our organization, but to our agencies, and ultimately our hungry neighbors. What we say and do can be the difference between having a meal on the table or not for families in Northern Illinois. In an effort to solve hunger in our service area, the Food Bank will work alongside Feeding America, Feeding Illinois and like-minded partners to engage with and educate elected public officials, member agencies and the public through strategic actions, such as in-person meetings, trainings, and the utilization of social and traditional media, to protect and strengthen government policies that impact hunger. In calendar year 2019, Northern Illinois Food Bank has identified key State and Federal priorities:

### **State:**

- Advocate for a strong Illinois budget policies that supports social services, the non-profit sector, and programs that are vital to solving hunger and those we serve
- Advocate for administrative, distribution, and eligibility policies that preserve and strengthen nutrition programs in order to effectively reduce hunger

### **Federal:**

- Support federal budget policies that ensure funding to support programs that are vital to solving hunger and those we serve
- Advocate for policies, administrative rules and regulations that support and strengthen federal nutrition programs in order to reduce the incidents of hunger

We will advocate for policies to support programs that can provide more meals to our hungry neighbors, build healthy communities and strengthen relationships. Our efforts may not be limited to our following outlined priorities as additional opportunities for the Food Bank to take action in support of legislation that affects our ability to feed our hungry neighbors may arise throughout the year. Our priorities must 1. Directly impact the operation of the Food Bank, 2. Impact food supply or access to food for our hungry neighbors or 3. Impact the nutritional well-being of our hungry neighbors. The priorities, along with our guidelines, will help the Food Bank positively impact the work we engage in, those we serve, and strengthen the partnership between private and public sectors to better serve our communities.

### **State Advocacy Priorities:**

#### **1. Advocate for a strong Illinois budget that supports social services, the non-profit sector, programs that are vital to solving hunger and those we serve.**

Though Northern Illinois Food Bank does not depend on state funding for our operations, a strong budget is beneficial to the work we do and is vital to many of our community partners and neighbors. As a leader in hunger relief, we work alongside countless community partners to address issues of poverty and hunger. The past Illinois state budget impasse forced a number of our partners to cut down on services, and in some cases, close their doors, which impacted our work in solving hunger. In order to best serve our neighbors and community, it is imperative that Illinois has a strong budget that supports the social services, the non-profit sector, and programs that are vital to solving hunger.

#### **2. Advocate for administrative, distribution, and eligibility policies that preserve and strengthen nutrition programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).**

SNAP, the largest hunger relief program in the nation, is effective and efficient in providing assistance to families in need. In Illinois, nearly two million households participate in SNAP. Forty percent of those families have children and 20 percent are elderly. Working together, the Food Bank and SNAP solve hunger. The Food Bank will advocate for policies that ensure a fully-funded and, therefore, fully-capable and responsive program. Additionally, in recent months there have been a number of administrative rules proposed and applied to SNAP that has the potential to negatively impact the program's efficiency. The Food Bank will continue to work with state government agencies, such as the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), and local advocacy partners to protect the efficacy of



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SNAP and ensure our neighbors are educated about any changes that may occur to their ability to access assistance.

### **Federal Advocacy Priorities:**

#### **1. Support federal budget policies that ensure funding to support programs that are vital to solving hunger, such as SNAP, TEFAP, and other federally funded nutrition programs**

There are a number of federally funded programs that create a safety net to help our neighbors facing hunger. These programs, such as SNAP and TEFAP, work in tandem with the Food Bank and create a successful public-private partnership for which we strive. It is important to the Food Bank's work and to our hungry neighbors that these programs continue to be fully funded. The current administration has proposed budgetary cuts, and, in some cases, have already taken steps to lower funding for these programs. The effected programs include: SNAP, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and Child and Adult Care Feeding Program (CACFP). These programs are critical to those that we serve. Last year:

- The SNAP Outreach team assisted over 1,500 households in applying for SNAP, which resulted in nearly 1.3 million meals.
- The Summer Meals Program served more than 265,000 meals through 175 partner sites and is supported by SFSP.
- The Afterschool Meals Program served 629,000 meals and snacks through 179 sites. This program is made possible by CACFP.

#### **2. Advocate for policies, administrative rules and regulations that promotes efficient and effective federal nutrition programs**

Since the passing of the most recent Farm Bill (H.R. 2 - Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018) in the fall of 2018, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has introduces a number of administrative rules that would impact SNAP's effectiveness to serve our neighbors.

##### **Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) Time Limits**

In early 2019, the USDA proposed a rule change that would impact state's ability to apply for work-requirement waivers for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDS), based on the economy, unemployment rate and availability of work in a given region. In December 2019, the USDA announced the adoption of these new rules redefines some key concepts and changes the criteria that states must meet in order to receive ABAWD waivers. This change is planned to go into effect April 1, 2020. Currently, every county in Illinois with the exception of Cook and DuPage is eligible to receive ABAWD waivers; however, under the new criteria, Illinois must reapply for 2020 waivers. When the state reapplies, it is expected that all but a few counties will no longer be eligible to receive the ABAWD waiver. In that case, an estimated 50,000 individuals in our service area could be at risk of losing their SNAP benefits.

##### **Broad-based Categorical Eligibility**

In mid-2019, the USDA proposed changes to SNAP's eligibility criteria and application. States are allowed significant flexibility in how they implement SNAP. Forty-two states use a state option known as "broad-based categorical eligibility," which allows them to adjust income cutoffs and asset limits so that working families don't abruptly lose much of their SNAP benefits when they earn slightly more. Allowing states to adjust the asset limit also helps seniors and people with disabilities by removing the savings disincentive in SNAP. The USDA's proposed rule would severely restrict the Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility option for states. If this rule is put into place, Illinois would have to drastically lower their income guidelines from 165% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL) to 130% of FPL – thus causing over 25,000 households to lose their eligibility for SNAP in the Food Bank's service area and greatly increasing their food insecurity. Not only will this rule directly impact SNAP participation, it will also indirectly impact a number of child nutrition programs that look to SNAP participation and eligibility in a community in order to ascertain a community's eligibility for After-School and Summer Meals (CACFP and SFSP). It is estimated that over 500,000 children nationally will lose access to Free & Reduced Lunch with this proposed rule change.



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### **The Department of Homeland Security's Public Charge Rule**

In late 2018 the Department of Homeland Security, introduced a policy change that would vastly redefine the concept of Public Charge that would cause countless immigrant families to drop or lose their SNAP benefits. Under immigration law, the Department of Homeland Security can deny someone a visa or residency if they believe that person is likely to become a "public charge," meaning they are likely to rely on government support for their livelihood. Public charge is a test that looks at the full picture of the individual: age, income, family size, health status, public benefits, etc. Currently, the only benefits counted against you in this test are cash assistance (TANF, Supplemental Security Income, general assistance), and long-term institutionalization care. The proposed rule included other benefits, such as SNAP, Medicaid, public housing and Medicare Part D. While the change wouldn't impact those currently navigating the immigration system, since the programs outlined in the proposed new rule are available to citizens and eligible permanent residents, it is spurring confusion and fear in many families. Thankfully, this rule has been temporarily blocked in courts, but it was only due to the work the Food Bank and our anti-hunger partners.

The Food Bank has been, and will continue to advocate for administrative policies that keep federal nutrition programs effective and efficient, but also equitable and clear for those who are in need.

### **Conclusion**

This Advocacy Agenda aims to create clear direction for the Advocacy team within calendar year 2020. In addition to these targeted issues, we will track legislation that could impact the Food Bank and the neighbors we serve. By focusing on key issues and relationship building, we will be able to collaborate within our own organization and in working with other organizations, increasing our leadership role in the areas of public education and advocacy to solve hunger in Northern Illinois.