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# Baker-Polito Administration Invests $56 Million to Combat Food Insecurity in Massachusetts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Office of Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito

Governor's Press Office

Executive Office of Health and Human Services

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**BOSTON** — The Baker-Polito Administration today announced $56 million to combat urgent food insecurity for some Massachusetts families and individuals as a result of COVID-19. This funding is consistent with findings of the Food Security Task Force, which was convened by the Massachusetts COVID-19 Command Center in response to increased demands for food assistance. The task force is comprised of a broad group of public and private members charged with ensuring food insecurity and food supply needs are addressed during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

"These funds jump start some of the recommendations to address urgent needs and food supply chain issues due to the COVID-19 pandemic for communities across the

Commonwealth," **said Governor Charlie Baker.** "While COVID-19 has had a statewide impact, some of our communities and residents who have historically experienced food insecurity have been even more disproportionately impacted."

"Our Administration has always been focused on supporting residents and families dealing with food insecurity, especially now during the COVID-19 outbreak," **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito. "**We thank the Food Security Task Force for their work on these important issues, and are glad to make these crucial investments."

The Administration will continue to utilize the Food Security Task Force and work with the Legislature to address food security issues going forward.

"Longstanding food assistance programs including the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (**SNAP** (/snap-benefits-formerly-food-stamps)) and Women, Infant and Children's Program (**WIC** (/wic-information-for-participants)) are experiencing significant increases in assistance applications. In addition, community-based food banks are seeing skyrocketing demand and local grocers and farmers are struggling to meet the needs of consumers," **said COVID-19 Command Center Director and Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders.** "I am appreciative of the task force's practical recommendations to meet immediate needs as well as the longer-term solutions."

"We are pleased to provide new funding to a wide array of programs and initiatives in order to help ensure individuals and families have access to affordable, nutritious food during the COVID-19 pandemic," **said Secretary of Administration and Finance Michael J. Heffernan.** "This funding builds upon other critical COVID-19 resources which are being distributed by the Administration in partnership with the Legislature, including the $502 million in federal Coronavirus Relief Funds which will support important municipal initiatives, such as food assistance, during this public health crisis."

"Increasing food security is essential to protecting the health of Massachusetts residents, and the funding and recommendations made available through the Task Force will help meet greater demand for nutritional assistance among vulnerable populations and those struggling with the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic," **said Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Kathleen Theoharides**. "The ongoing crisis has also highlighted the importance of reinforcing our local food supply chain, and this investment

from the Baker-Polito Administration will provide needed capital to the farmers, fishermen, food banks, and distributors that are helping the Commonwealth respond to this unprecedented public health emergency."

In less than a month, the Food Security Task Force, which was convened on April 22, synthesized and prioritized more than 80 recommendations into the following four key actionable categories:

- Develop and implement an emergency food program
- Fortify the food bank system
- Maximize federal resources for food and nutrition
- Reinforce and redeploy the food system infrastructure

As the task force continues its work going forward, today the Administration announces:

- A **$36 million COVID-19 Food Security Infrastructure Grant Program** with a goal of ensuring that individuals and families have access to food. Eligible services include:
  - Increasing capacity for food direct delivery;
  - Increasing capacity of food banks and food pantries;
  - Increasing capacity of local food distribution partners;
  - Innovative solutions to enable those receiving SNAP and WIC benefits to receive food more easily;
  - Innovative solutions for urban farming and
  - Farms, retailers, fisheries and other food system businesses to help them adapt to the disruptions and to allow them to provide greater access to local food.
- **$5 million** increase for the **Healthy Incentives Program** (/healthy-incentives-program-hip) to meet increased demand for local produce and to increase access points that process SNAP and HIP benefits.
- **$12 million** for the provision of 25,000 family food boxes per week through a regional food supply system. Each family food box contains 30 to 35 meals.  Food boxes would be distributed throughout the state to food pantries.

- **$3 million** in funding as an immediate relief valve to food banks.

The work of the task force builds on Massachusetts' initiatives to increase access to food, including establishing emergency food distribution sites and school meal sites for food distribution, implementing Pandemic EBT to provide food to 500,000 youth who usually receive free or reduced priced lunch, distributing additional SNAP benefits to households, requesting online EBT purchasing approval from the federal government, and streamlining food benefit program administration.

Additionally, the Commonwealth recently **released funding** (/news/baker-polito-administration-to-distribute-502-million-from-the-federal-coronavirus-relief-fund) from the federal Coronavirus Relief Fund to local cities and towns of up to $502 million and highlighted food insecurity as an eligible program.

Reporting up to the COVID-19 Command Center and Secretary Sudders, the work of the Food Security Task Force will continue as a private-public partnership, chaired by Energy and Environmental Affairs Secretary Kathleen Theoharides, Department of Transitional Assistance Commissioner Amy Kershaw and Jill Shah, President of the Shah Family Foundation.

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## Office of Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito

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Governor Charlie Baker, Lt. Governor Karyn Polito and the Baker-Polito Administration are working to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak and keep Massachusetts residents safe and healthy.

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