

Massachusetts Anti-Hunger Organization Joint Press Statement on the Government Shutdown

By: [Massachusetts Law Reform Institute](#), [The Greater Boston Food Bank](#), [The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts](#), [Merrimack Valley Food Bank](#), [Worcester County Food Bank](#), and [Project Bread](#).

Massachusetts – Wednesday, January 15, 2019

As MA anti-hunger and advocacy organizations, we are united in our commitment to being here for those struggling with hunger across the state, especially the most vulnerable among us—children, seniors, people living with disabilities, and low-income families. We are united in calling for the end of the shutdown of the federal government and its detrimental effects on federal nutrition programs.

We are deeply concerned that the shutdown is causing wide-spread fear and confusion across the Commonwealth, particularly for the nearly 770,000 residents who utilize the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to put food on their table. That's 1 in 9 Massachusetts residents.

The average monthly SNAP benefit of \$215 for a family is a critical nutrition resource for our lowest income residents, although not enough to meet any family's monthly food budget. SNAP provides approximately \$100 million in monthly nutrition benefits to eligible households in the Commonwealth, spent at local grocery stores and farmers markets.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) shuttering will result in direct consequences for federal nutrition programs such as SNAP and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP or USDA food commodities) and Child Nutrition Programs such as school meals and WIC.

Although USDA's contingency plan ensures SNAP benefits will be paid for February, they are being issued early – creating stress and confusion in the day to day lives of millions of low-income families. If the shutdown continues, it is not clear whether USDA will be able to continue issuing SNAP into March.

This uncertainly wreaks havoc in the lives of low-income households who need to put food on the table and in the refrigerator. If the shutdown continues, many more low-income households will need to turn to the emergency food network in Massachusetts.

As the shutdown stretches on, thousands of furloughed workers – including TSA agents and members of the Coast Guard – may need to turn to the emergency food network and SNAP as they find it increasingly difficult to afford food.

Despite their best efforts, food banks, pantries, and community meal programs will not be able to fill this void. This emergency is further exacerbated by the lack of certainty that TEFAP will be funded beyond February. TEFAP provides limited funds and commodity foods to food banks allowing their member agencies to feed even more people.

We commend the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) for the steps it is taking to clearly communicate the impact of the shutdown on SNAP under extremely difficult and uncertain conditions.

We call on the Governor to begin preparing a state “disaster plan” to respond to an anticipated spike in demand for emergency food should this crisis continue past February. We further ask the Governor to ensure stability for households impacted by the shutdown by urging his colleagues in Congress and the President to end this shutdown. A fully-funded USDA is the only way to ensure a vibrant nutrition safety-net.

We will continue to monitor the situation, share information with the public, and redouble our efforts to ensure everyone in Massachusetts has access to food. Hunger is a non-partisan issue, and no one in our country should ever go without enough to eat.

If an individual is seeking food assistance, please use Project Bread’s [FoodSource Hotline](#) at 800-645-8333 or www.gettingsnap.org or use the app [Helpsteps](#) to find local food resources. For updated information regarding SNAP benefits please visit Mass.gov/DTA.

Updated on Wednesday, January 16, 2019.