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
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