



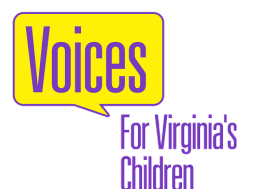
VOICES FOR VIRGINIA'S CHILDREN 2022 FOOD AND NUTRITION ACCESS POLICY AGENDA

Prepared by:

Voices for Virginia's Children

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Virginia has a diversity of communities across urban, suburban, and rural localities, but many areas – known as food deserts – lack access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.

Depending on where a child, family, or community member lives, works, or attends school, they may not have access to fresh and nutritious food at all. Contributing factors include the proximity to grocery stores in rural or urban areas, limited access to a vehicle, and the quality of the food within reach to families. As a result, diet-related illnesses, especially among children, are on the rise.

Informed Perspective:

Voices empowers children, youth, and families disproportionately impacted by inequitable outcomes as agents in the creation of policy solutions to ignite change in their communities. Through our advocacy and engagement efforts, including Racial Truth and Reconciliation Virginia and other networks and partnerships, Voices additionally embraces perspectives of direct-service professionals and policy professionals. It is our goal to create trauma-informed and healing centered spaces for advocates to share their truths and to reckon and reconcile trauma through systems change.

Voices for Virginia's Children is part of the following related coalitions and work groups:

- **Health, Wealth, & Justice Policy Network:** Voices' leads the HWJ policy network, a network that address the social determinants of health and overall child health and community wellness as it relates to improvements of conditions where individuals live, work, and play.
- **Virginia Food Access Coalition:** Voices supports the VFAC The Virginia Food Access Coalition, which is led by the American Heart Association- Virginia. The coalition provides data and resources to support stakeholders in identifying gaps to maximize their impact and better serve Virginians struggling with access to healthy food and hunger.



Reduce Diet-Related Chronic Illnesses

Eating healthy is one of the easiest and smartest ways for families to take control of their health. Numerous studies have demonstrated the correlation between food insecurity and poor health outcomes, particularly higher levels of chronic disease such as diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease, hepatitis, stroke, cancer, asthma, arthritis, COPN, and CKD. A healthy nutrition is part of the prevention and health care needed to promote long-term healthier outcomes. Equitable access to health and wellness includes the elimination of barriers that exist where children live.

To Move Virginia Forward:

- **SUPPORT THE VIRGINIA PRODUCE RX PILOT PROGRAM- DECREASE DIET-RELATED CHRONIC ILLNESS ALONGSIDE HEALTHCARE.**

The Produce Rx program will provide fresh, locally grown produce alongside healthcare and nutrition counseling to empower patients to overcome barriers to the consumption of fruits and vegetables. The program will allow medical professionals in Virginia to prescribe fresh fruit and vegetables to patients experiencing diet-related chronic illnesses, including diabetes, pre-diabetes, and high blood pressure and food insecurity. Support the Produce RX Pilot Program to increase healthy and nutritious food consumption for individuals with diagnosed chronic disease from a licensed Doctor of Medicine, osteopathy and podiatry, a licensed nurse practitioner, licensed physician assistant, or registered dietitian nutritionist has deemed appropriate for a benefit through a prescription and/or individuals who qualify for SNAP, Medicaid, or TANF.

Support Local Farmers & Access to Healthy & Nutritious Foods

Access to affordable, Virginia-grown produce is expanding through farmers markets, mobile markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), farm stands, and community grocery stores. With increasing food insecurity, more Virginians participate in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and spend over a billion dollars in SNAP benefits annually.

To Move Virginia Forward:

- **INVEST IN VIRGINIA FRESH MATCH.**

Fresh Match is a network of farmers markets and community food stores across Virginia that offer nutrition incentives, doubling the value of SNAP spent at participating retailers to connect Virginia families with affordable, nutritious produce from local sources. When more SNAP money is spent on local produce, everyone benefits. Provide funding to increase access to healthy and nutritious foods for low-income consumers and help family farmers, producers, retailers, and local economies.



Scale Up Virginia's Food Supply Chain & Infrastructure

Due to COVID-19, the funding and infrastructure needs for Virginia's food supply chain has become prevalent – from under resourced farmers and food distributors to high demands on Virginia food banks. The Virginia Food Access Investment Fund expands the number of retailers and entrepreneurs who will provide access to nutritious fruits and vegetables and SNAP incentives to bridge the gaps in our food supply system, especially in food desert areas.

To Move Virginia Forward:

- **FUND THE VIRGINIA FOOD ACCESS INVESTMENT PROGRAM.**

Provide funding to the Virginia Food Access Investment fund to support the establishment, construction, rehabilitation, equipment upgrades, and expansion of grocery stores, small food retailers, and other innovative food retail projects in underserved communities across the state.

Governor's Budget Items:

- **VIRGINIA AGRICULTURE FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM:**

Continues the Virginia Agriculture Food Assistance Program established to expand the capacity of Virginia's network of food providers to accept, store, and distribute food products, \$11M allotted in the first year to the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

What We Are Watching:

Build Back Better would provide better nutrition access to students by expanding the summer EBT program allowing eligible families to receive additional assistance to purchase meals during the summer months or while schools are closed. The proposal also strengthens the Community Eligibility Provision that allows schools to opt in to provide free meals to the entire school enrollment.