



2021 Washington State Legislative Session Summary

Each year, Food Lifeline sets out to work with legislative champions in Olympia and Washington DC on policies to solve hunger problems, protect successful safety net programs, and secure new investments for hunger relief efforts. We are happy to report progress in all these areas during the virtually-held 2021 Washington State Session.

Importantly, Food Lifeline recognizes our advocates and supporters, including partners that helped make this body of work possible: Anti-Hunger & Nutrition Coalition, Northwest Harvest, Poverty Action Network, Racial Equity Team, Washington Anti-Poverty Advocates, Faith Action Network, United Way of King County, Working Families Tax Credit Coalition, Balance Our Tax Code Coalition, Second Harvest, Feeding The Northwest, Washington State Department of Agriculture, Food Fighters and Opportunity for All Legislative Caucuses.

Food Systems

State Food System Resiliency | Food Lifeline Position: “Actively support WSDA’s full budget request for state food system infrastructure and market access grants for farms, food processors and food distributors.” **Outcome: WIN.** The Operating budget assigns Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund (federal) appropriations of \$9 million for WSDA to offer grants for solving problems that limit the state’s ability to quickly access local agricultural and food resources and improve the distribution system that brings these resources to hunger relief efforts in local communities; and \$8 million solely for local food system infrastructure and market access grants, prioritized for women, minority, and small business owners.

SB 5092, Operating Budget | Bipartisan vote? No | Total appropriation: \$17,000,000

Food Bank Redistributor Investments | Food Lifeline Position: “Actively support measures to direct investment to regional hunger-relief organizations serving as redistribution hubs, to be used for facility, equipment, technology, and staff capacity improvements.” **Outcome: WIN.** Funding for this purpose is envisioned within WSDA appropriations (see Emergency Food Assistance Program below).

Farm to Food Pantry | Food Lifeline Position: “Support budget request to expand this WSDA program that encourages produce donation and purchasing between local food pantries and small-scale farmers.” **Outcome: WIN.** Funding for this purpose is envisioned within WSDA appropriations

Washington State Food Policy Forum | Food Lifeline Position: “Support budget request to continue this public-private partnership created to promote Washington food system goals.” **Outcome: WIN.** The forum engages stakeholders in agriculture, state agencies, and nonprofits to coordinate and advance food policy, programs & related issues in Washington. Among other things, the forum will promote “strengthening hunger safety net programs to ensure they are reaching low income people in need.” We secured operating budget funding to continue convening the forum over the next two fiscal years.

SB 5092, Operating Budget | Bipartisan vote? Yes | Total appropriation: \$340,000 (ongoing)

Capital Budget Project | Outcome: WIN. Food Lifeline secured capital funding to expand our Hunger Solution Center warehouse freezer/cooler space to 26,462 square feet. This will allow us to handle more perishable foods, alleviate

the expense of off-site storage, and will distribute for more nutritious food to local agency partners. Special thanks to our project champions Senator Karen Keiser and Representative Mia Gregerson.

SHB 1080, Capital Budget | Bipartisan vote? Yes | Total appropriation: \$827,000

Hunger and Health

SNAP Fruit & Vegetable Incentive Programs | Food Lifeline Position: “Actively support DOH’s \$3 budget request for programs that help SNAP participants afford more fruits and vegetables.” **Outcome: WIN.** Funding was secured to continue Department of Health programs that make it easier for SNAP and WIC households to afford more fruits and vegetables: *Complete Eats Fruits and Vegetable Coupons* that can be redeemed at Safeway grocery stores, *Farmers Market Match* (“Fresh Bucks”) at local farmers markets statewide, and in health settings, and *Fruit and Vegetable Vouchers* given by health professionals to patients with a qualifying health condition or who are food insecure.

SB 5092, Operating Budget | Bipartisan vote? No | Total appropriation: \$3,000,000

Washington Produce Donation | Food Lifeline Position: “Actively support measures to help fund large-scale procurement of donated Washington produce for hunger relief efforts statewide.” **Outcome: WIN.** Funding to accomplish this purpose is envisioned within WSDA appropriations. Notably, the Operating budget assigns money from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund (federal appropriation) solely to “develop a state alternative to the United States Department of Agriculture Farmers to Families food box program and provide resources for hunger relief organizations, including organizations that serve BIPOC and other socially disadvantaged communities.”

SB 5092, Operating Budget | Bipartisan vote? No | Total appropriation: \$45,000,000

Hunger Prevention

Emergency Food Assistance Program | Food Lifeline Position: “Actively support WSDA’s EFAP budget request for food & operational expenses at local food pantries and food bank distribution centers.” **Outcome: WIN.** Food Lifeline helped secure the Washington State Department of Agriculture’s (WSDA) budget request for food & operational expenses for local food pantries and food bank distribution centers. This funding will help bolster hunger relief agencies statewide and increase their ability to serve their communities.

SB 5092, Operating Budget | Bipartisan vote? No | Total appropriation: \$23.1 million

Food Assistance to SNAP Households | Food Lifeline Position: “Support a one-time cash benefit and 5-month temporary food assistance program to help people who are transitioning off of SNAP or FAP enrollment.” **Outcome: WIN.** Passage of HB 1151 provides a one-time cash benefit and a 5-month temporary food assistance program to help people who are transitioning off SNAP or Food Assistance Program enrollment; extends Disaster Cash Assistance Program (\$12 million, one-time) for individuals and families who have little access to other resources; and updates our state’s needs standard to accurately capture today’s costs of living when determining eligibility for public benefits.

HB 1151, Rep Mari Leavitt | Bipartisan vote? Yes | Total appropriation: \$989,000

Food Assistance Program | Food Lifeline Position: “Support funding to provide the maximum food benefit level for people (legal immigrants) who qualify for FAP.” **Outcome: WIN.** Funding was approved to bring Washington state into compliance with federal standards. **FY21: \$4.7 million**

Food & Cash Assistance Benefit Reviews | Food Lifeline Position: “Support pausing safety net benefit reviews until June 2021 for Basic Food, TANF, State Family Assistance, and Aged, Blind or Disabled programs.” **Outcome: WIN.**

School Meals | Food Lifeline Position: “Support measures to improve access and availability of school nutrition programs, like Farm to School grant funding for local produce purchasing.” **Outcome: WIN.** With HB 1342, the legislature extends to all grades its eliminating lunch co-pays for low income families participating in free or reduced-price school meals.

HB 1342, Rep April Berg | Bipartisan vote? Yes | Total appropriation: \$8.8 million

School Meals | Farm to School Grants. Food Lifeline Position: “Support measures to improve access and availability of school nutrition programs, like Farm to School grant funding for local produce purchasing.” **Outcome: WIN.** One-time, federal funding was made available to schools to increase purchases of local fresh fruits & vegetables.

SB 5092, Operating Budget | Bipartisan vote? No | Total appropriation: \$5 million

Poverty

Working Families Tax Credit/Recovery Rebate | Food Lifeline Position: “Actively support a direct cash assistance tax credit of at least \$500 for lower income workers disproportionately harmed by the pandemic.” **Outcome: WIN.**

Washington state has the most regressive tax systems in the country, with lower-income people paying higher rates than wealthy people. This bill eases the tax burden on working families by giving a portion of sales tax money back to them - between \$300 to \$970 in refunds to low-income workers and families who qualify.

HB 1297, Rep My-Linh Thai | Bipartisan vote? Yes | Total appropriation: \$242 million (FY23)

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families | Food Lifeline Position: “Support measures to improve critical TANF resources and support offered to families with children living in deep poverty.” **Outcome: WIN.** This assistance program is for families with children in deep poverty. It provides for things like housing and basic needs. Several very significant measures succeeded this session that will improve the support offered by the program. To start, TANF grant amounts were increased 15% with an additional appropriation of \$52.2 million ongoing. Another \$22.8 million was set aside for one-time cash assistance for families with low incomes. With passage of SB 5214, by Sen Joe Nguyen, there will now be TANF benefit time limit extensions for months when the statewide unemployment rate is at or above 7% and will be implemented on July 1, 2022. This change will support families with 7 additional months of TANF assistance based on the unemployment rate in Washington since the onset of COVID and remain available for future periods of economic downturn.

SB 5214, Sen Joe Nguyen | Bipartisan votes? Yes | Total appropriations: \$102.2 million

State Housing Trust Fund & Rental Assistance | Food Lifeline Position: “Support measures to increase & preserve affordable housing and assistance for renters at risk of eviction.” **Outcome: WIN.** The legislature approved multiple measures aimed at affordable housing and homelessness. They include bills: to ensure that landlords cannot evict a tenant without having a legitimate reason for doing so; create a new rental assistance program to help people get caught up on rent; provides legal representation for tenants facing eviction, requires repayment plans for unpaid rent during the pandemic, and ensures that landlords and tenants can access state rental assistance programs; modified allowed uses of local tax revenue for affordable housing; concerning relocation assistance for tenants of closed or converted manufactured/mobile home parks; maintaining funding and assistance for homeowners navigating the foreclosure process; and supporting emergency shelters and housing through local planning and development regulations. The Capital budget continues investments in the Housing Trust Fund by appropriating \$175 million to it.

HB 1236, Rep Nicole Macri, HB 1277, Rep Timm Ormsby, SB 5160, Sen Patty Kuderer, HB 1070, Rep Cindy Ryu, HB 1083, Rep Mia Gregerson, HB 1108, Rep Tina Orwall, HB 1220, Rep Strom Peterson

Housing and Essential Needs. This program helps ensure that temporary disabilities don't force people onto the streets, by providing emergency rent & utility assistance and by providing access to some of life's most basic household and sanitary needs. We lobbied for additional funding and helped secure a \$23.9 million increase to prevent homelessness and help more temporarily disabled adults.

SB 5092, Operating Budget | Bipartisan vote? Yes | Total appropriations: \$88,300,000

Equity & Social Justice

Racial Equity | Food Lifeline Position: “Monitor for support, policies aimed at dismantling institutional racism and inequitable and unjust systems that create and perpetuate determinants of hunger.” **Outcome: WIN.** The legislature passed bills adding restrictions on police tactics and guidelines for when officers could use deadly force, and requirements for officers to intervene when witnessing such force. Separate legislation required the collection of use-of-force data and made it easier to decertify officers for bad actions.

HB 1310, HB 1054, Rep Jesse Johnson | Bipartisan vote? No

SB 5259, Sen T’wina Nobles | Bipartisan vote? Yes

HB 1267, Rep Debra Entenman | Bipartisan vote? No

Washington State Equity Office | Food Lifeline Position: “Support fully funding the efforts of the state office of equity.” **Outcome: WIN.** In 2019, Food Lifeline helped secure initial funding to create a state office to coordinate equity initiatives across state government. Subsequent funding for the Equity Office in 2020 was vetoed on account of emergency cuts necessitated by the pandemic. This session funding was restored.

SB 5092, Operating Budget | Bipartisan vote? No | Total appropriation: \$988,000

Digital Equity | Food Lifeline Position: “Support measures to promote equity in digital broadband access to help more people connect to important safety net services, or educational and work opportunities.” **Outcome: WIN.** Lawmakers approved eight bills and made Capital and Operating budget investments related to addressing broadband infrastructure and access.

SB 5092, Operating Budget, SHB 1080, Capital Budget | Total appropriations: ~\$468 million

Tax, Budget, and Nonprofits

Capital Gains Tax | Food Lifeline Position: “Support measures to rebalance Washington’s regressive tax code while providing more revenue for community investments.” **Outcome: WIN.** .

SB 5096, Sen June Robinson | Bipartisan vote? No | Total Expected Revenue: \$415 million annual

Total Appropriations: ~\$1,195,000,000

For more information:

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