

2022 Legislative Agenda



ANTI-HUNGER PRIORITIES

Expand the number of schools that provide meals at no cost to all students

Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows eligible high poverty schools to opt in to providing school breakfasts and lunches at no cost to all students. This increases access to the consistent nutrition that children need to focus on learning, while streamlining administrative burdens in school meal operations, and improving the financial viability of school nutrition programs. Washington already requires CEP eligible schools that can be fully reimbursed at the highest rate from USDA to use this tool (EHB 2660, enacted in 2020), but this leaves federal dollars on the table while students go hungry. Increasing Washington's use of CEP is crucial to mitigate the impact on struggling families and struggling school districts, ensuring the continuity of no-cost school meals when current federal waivers expire. **Support HB 1878, including the fiscal support needed, to require eligible schools to use CEP to provide universal meals.**

Improve the quality of household poverty data with an accessible, online school meal application

School meals provide consistent nutrition to students who struggle with hunger. The application must be accessible to families so they don't miss out on this crucial resource that ensures kids have the fuel they need to focus on learning. An online portal, translated into multiple languages, and accepted by all school districts will make it easier for families to find school meal applications or complete the household income survey used to collect household poverty data used for state education and other school funding resources. **Support HB 1833 and funding to create and translate an online school meal/household income form.**

Provide resources to support food resources and capacity investments for food banks

According to the University of Washington's WAFood Study, food banks were the most frequently used food assistance program for the increased number of households struggling with food insecurity during the pandemic. Last year, the Legislature appropriated funding to support food boxes stocked with Washington grown foods and flexible funding for infrastructure and equipment grants for food banks. Adding to these resources ensures nutritious food for struggling families, economic revenue for Washington farms and strengthens our local food economies. **Increase funding for WSDA's We Feed WA and Food Assistance Program Capacity Grants.**

Increase access to the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program

The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program provides vouchers for low-income seniors to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables from their local farmers market. This provides a critical resource for nutritious food to help keep seniors healthy, active, and independent. **Support \$400,000 increase to Senior FMNP to expand access to this benefit to more eligible seniors.**

Strengthen Washington's food system resiliency with capital budget support for Yakima project

Northwest Harvest is consolidating our warehousing and storage of Washington grown foods in Yakima. Support from the state for the cold storage system for this \$32 million facility will help quadruple the amount of fresh, locally grown produce for food banks and meal programs in every county of our state and provide affordable cold storage for small producers transporting product to market or processing. **Include \$3.2 million for the cold storage system for Northwest Harvest's Yakima project in the final supplemental capital budget.**

2022 Support Agenda

Housing and Homelessness

Food insecurity and housing insecurity go hand in hand when meals are skipped to save money to pay the rent. We support tenant protections including **HB 1904 which will require landlords to give tenants six months' notice before raising the rent** and limits late fees.

We also support **Governor Inslee's proposal for \$495 million for Commerce to support permanent and shelter housing**. Of this, \$100 million for the Housing Trust Fund will help build about 1,500 permanent supportive housing and permanent affordable housing units. These investments are critical for Washingtonians struggling with housing insecurity and homelessness, including homeless families, youths and individuals, veterans, farmworkers, seniors, and individuals with special needs, will be able to get the housing and support they need.

Economic Stability

We made significant strides in 2021 to begin to balance our upside-down tax code, but in 2022, we will continue to advocate for our lawmakers to remake our tax code to support an economy that works for all of us.

These policies include **HB 1888 to make an important implementation fix to the Working Families Tax Credit and provide funding to support successful outreach** to help families access WFTC. The WFTC will have a direct impact on reducing hunger when families can stretch their household budgets further and not have to choose between food and other essential needs such as housing and health care.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, also known as TANF, is a lifeline for many families in our state. **HB 2048 will reinstate broad hardship exemptions from the 60-month lifetime limit** recognizing recipients' compliance but need more time, and **SB 5838, providing a diaper stipend to TANF families with infants and young children**.

Guaranteed Basic Income provides unconditional cash payments for low-income households to help reduce poverty, increase economic mobility, and improve health and well-being. We support having the final supplemental budget include funding for GBI pilots to continue testing how temporary, flexible cash assistance can create economic stability for different populations struggling with poverty.

Community Services Offices must maintain some in-person services for populations who have limited access to phone or internet. HB 2075 will help maintain public benefits access by setting a floor for sufficient in-person access.

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Northwest Harvest believes that equitable access to nutritious food is a basic human right. We provide nutritious food to a statewide network of 375 food pantries, meal programs, and high need schools.