

## Advocacy Update 3.3.19



### NTFB VOICE Advocacy Update

ADVOCATING FOR A HUNGER-FREE, HEALTHY NORTH TEXAS

This Advocacy Update is dedicated to **you**. The Advocate.

Never has the spirit of North Texas shone so bright. Hunger is simply unacceptable and because we can all start there; our path forward is clear. In the past two weeks YOU have fought to increase food security in our community, and I am so grateful. Please allow me a few moments to proudly highlight you, our advocate.

Advocacy is a team sport.

NTFB, and all those it serves, is so lucky to have such a great team on its side.

#### **AUSTIN, TEXAS STATE CAPITOL**

Our priorities for the 86th State Legislative session center around access: access to nutritious foods and access to services that increase food security. I want to recognize our board members, Katherine Reeves and Tom Black for lending their guidance and support on this great day. And, I want to recognize the members of our programs and partners team, the external affairs team, and our partner agencies who took an entire day of their schedule to travel with us down to Austin and serve as subject matter experts in their respective areas.

Below are our four main asks and the most current updates. As you read through them, you can see exactly where Jennifer Mays, Whitney Whitaker, Alana Pierre, Sara Gorath, and Madison Messinger made strong cases and helped move these items forward. Alongside our staff, and thanks to Damaris Lawson's connections, our partners Allen Community Outreach, Pleasant Grove Food Pantry, City Square, Good Samaritans of Garland and Crossroad Community Services spoke to the lived experience of the client and the importance of these

items –

**1. Increase funding for the Surplus Agricultural Products Grant, Texans Feeding Texans from \$9.4 million dollars to \$19.4 million dollars.**

This grant item in the Texas State budget allows food banks to purchase produce that would otherwise be left in the growing fields because it does not meet grocery store quality. The imperfect produce may be too big, too small, or misshapen but it is perfectly nutritious.

With current funding we are only able to capture about 30% of this available produce and an increase in funding would go directly towards more fruits and vegetables for our clients.

**UPDATE: State Representative Munoz, member of the subcommittee on Article VI, will carry the rider to increase the funding of this line item to \$19.4M. The full subcommittee will need to vote to support this measure for it to move forward.**

**2. Simplify the SNAP application for our seniors.** The current Texas Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application is between 18-19 pages long and, on average, seniors need to renew their benefits every 6 months. Typically, seniors live on a fixed income, rarely have life changes that would change their benefits, and have higher barriers to successful renewals due to transportation or technology. A simplified application and longer benefit period would solve both of these issues and get more seniors, more food.

**UPDATE: State Senator Perry has filed the [Senior SNAP Simplification Bill](#). For this bill to move forward it will need to next be referred to committee, most likely Health and Human Services (and North Texas has many members on this committee!). There will be many ways to help move this forward, stay tuned.**

**3. Support a Food Banks network response in times of disaster.** During Hurricane Harvey, FEMA paid close to \$1 million dollars per truckload of food. Had the 21 food banks in Texas been able to assume this role, it would have cost around \$40,000 per truckload of food. The food bank network in Texas already exists and functions efficiently. Supporting the build-up of our already existent network would create an efficient system that not only knows how to respond, but where to respond. We have asked the legislature for money to cover the cost of food purchases and food bank infrastructure to prepare Texans for any future disasters.

**UPDATE: Representative Drew Darby submitted an Appropriations rider for \$25 million dollars to be given to food banks, broken down with a \$5 million dollar food purchase allowance and \$20 million dollar infrastructure allowance. Senator Creighton is requesting some additional support before submitting his version but things are looking optimistic.**

**4. Oppose bills that decrease access to nutritious foods, and support those who increase this access.** Often the spirit of some bills has good intentions or may be misinformed and miss the mark. Food bank advocates are experts in these fields and we are happy to provide guidance to bill authors and supporters.

**UPDATE: Most of these bills are not getting traction and are getting overshadowed by more pressing state matters such as public education finance and property tax law.**

External Affairs team members Anna Kurian, Devon Miller, Ashley Vandebush, Jeffrey King, Courtney Bagot, and Lisa Farrow advocated and/or did what they do best, used their talents and relationships to make this day a success. A grateful thanks to [The Dallas Coalition for Hunger Solutions](#) and their members for buying lunch for everyone to keep their minds and bodies strong on such a long day.

Basically....The day was great...and it has only just begun. Until *sine die*, we will need to

nurture and keep furthering the conversations we have opened. Our neighbors are counting on us.

If you'd like to read more about it, visit our [NTFB blog](#) or review the day on the [@NTFBVoice twitter account](#).

## WASHINGTON, DC, CAPITOL HILL

With the Farm Bill now in our review mirror (but still in our field of vision) this year on Capitol Hill was more about moving forward. The provisions in the Farm Bill were a huge win for food banks. We brought a message of thankfulness for a few of the much-appreciated items. Such as, the new extended (up to) 36-month certification length for the Senior Box program, a new Farm to Food Bank Program, and a higher TEFAP budget. Our CEO Trisha Cunningham, our Chief of External Affairs Erica Yaeger, and our board members Tom Black and Bill Hogg carried these messages into their meetings along with a few asks.

- TEFAP (the US Department of Agriculture food commodity program) has an authorized food budget allowance for \$318 Million and a storage and distribution amount of \$100 Million in FY2020. We would like to see the full amounts appropriated for each.

- We invited our members of Congress out to some of our mobile pantry distribution sites so they can see this model of food delivery to areas of high need and low real estate possibilities.

- We also asked our members to support the will of the Farm Bill authors and to avoid promoting loopholes to further an agenda that was not in the spirit of the bill.

While in DC, I met with the office of the Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee and also the office of the Administrator of the Food & Nutrition Service to discuss USDA Commodity Foods in the era of Trade Mitigation payouts. We are incredibly grateful for these bonus foods, but want to ensure that distribution channels for perishable products are as open as possible.

Huge thanks to the NTFB Operations team for sitting down to talk through these issues and solutions. With the help of Danny Foreman, Jerrye Hall, Doyle Carnahan, Bill Carneige, Whitney Whitaker, and Jill Vigil, we were able to take a workable solution to USDA that should open more access for those in need. Stay tuned to find out if this proposal was accepted.

There really is so much more going on in the world of government affairs and advocacy but this update has gotten long enough. Please make sure to keep [checking our website](#) to follow along with the bills of interest and stay alert for any action items that will surely pop up in the next few weeks.

Hope everyone had a great weekend!

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Questions or Comments? Angry, Happy? Tell me!

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Don't want these updates any longer? Email [policy@ntfb.org](mailto:policy@ntfb.org) and I'll remove you, and probably cry.