



## **Six Months into the Pandemic, City Adjusts Food Strategy to Meet Need—While Surpassing 5.5 Million Meal Mark**

***Amid shifting resources, City leverages community input, data analysis and partnerships to make sure food keeps flowing citywide***

**BALTIMORE, MD.**—Today, the Mayor's Office of Children & Family Success provided an update on the city's COVID-19 Emergency Food Strategy, highlighting efforts to maximize access to food for city residents this fall.

Since launching this past spring, the city's emergency food response has focused on creating, in a city with high concentrations of poverty and residents who are excluded from mainstream systems of support, an emergency food system that meets citywide need while also honoring personal dignity, agency and choice. The strategy is community-driven, data-informed and maximizes collective impact through a far-reaching network of support.

In the first six months of the pandemic, from March 18 through September, the city collaborated with 10 city agencies, dozens of nonprofit and corporate partners and more than 100 community-based organizations to distribute 5.5 million meals and 250,000 grocery and produce boxes across more than 300 sites citywide, along with \$650,000 in small food grants to 50 community organizations. Meal sites included schools, rec centers, community-based organizations, public housing communities and mobile meal stops, with rec centers accounting for one-third of the meals for youth and families during that time.

And now, six months in, the financial impact of the pandemic on city residents continues to mount. In March, 1 in 4 city residents participated in SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; by June, that had climbed to 1 in 3. And in March, 10% of renters in the city were behind on their rent; by June, that had risen to 28%.

"Six months into the pandemic we are expecting a second wave, the economic impact is devastating and we know the recovery will be long and hard. And as a city, we are committed to meeting residents' food needs throughout this extraordinarily difficult time," said Tisha Edwards, Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Children & Family Success which, with the Department of Planning, is leading coordination of the city's emergency food response. "We'll continue to assess need daily and weekly, and shift our strategy accordingly, to make sure we meet the food needs of all Baltimoreans—and historically underserved residents, in particular."

"I am thankful for these community organizations who are relentlessly committed to feeding their neighbors. Together, we have served over 6.8 million pounds of fresh produce and grocery boxes to improve nutritional food security," said Holly Freishtat, Food Policy Director in the

Department of Planning. "Federal nutrition assistance is an essential safety net. As we move into the fall and winter, it is vital that food policies such as SNAP benefits and P-EBT cards for students are protected and extended."

Going into fall and the new, all-virtual school year, key factors have altered Baltimore's food landscape and forced a shift in its emergency food strategy. With the start of the school year:

- Baltimore City Public Schools went from operating just 18 meal sites to 82
- The Baltimore Department of Recreation & Parks shifted its focus from meal distribution to supporting the city's Student Learning Centers in partnership with City Schools, and is serving meals at 9 rec centers this fall
- Department of Housing and Community Development mobile meal routes discontinued
- After providing more than 150,000 boxes at no cost to the city June-September, the federal Farmers to Families produce box program concluded
- A partnership with Amazon Flex, which delivered more than 20,000 grocery and produce boxes directly to residents' homes, ended at the end of September
- Demand for produce boxes remains very high
- Demand for grocery boxes is highest among older adults

Committed to keeping food flowing, the city leveraged ongoing data and map analysis, new resources and both new and existing partnerships to respond to the shifting landscape and reassess—and meet—need. With more schools and fewer rec centers serving meals, the city strategically leveraged community sites to fill new and different gaps on the youth and family meals front. The city committed \$2.8 million to ensure continued distribution of produce boxes by vendors Coastal Sunbelt and Common Market through December. The city is collaborating with World Central Kitchen to work with local restaurants to provide fresh-cooked meals for older adults. And where possible and needed, it is pooling resources to stand up and support food sites. For example, the Mayor's Office of Children & Family Success is partnering with Rec and Parks to open a rec center meal and produce site in South Baltimore staffed by participants in the city's Squeegee Alternative Plan.

As of October:

- daily meals for youth and families are available at 135 school, rec center and community meal sites, compared to about 100 sites during spring and summer
- approximately 43,000 produce boxes a month are available across 52 school, rec center and community meal sites, up from 40 sites this summer—to meet growing demand
- grocery boxes continue to be available at 9 community sites and via home delivery through a partnership between the Baltimore City Health Department and Salvation Army—in order to focus on distribution to older adults, who have requested the majority of boxes to date

Also this fall, schools have expanded their meal distribution hours from 10am-2pm to 8am-2pm, and as of October, they are providing 8 meals per person daily—two breakfasts, lunches, snacks and suppers—and lunches will be hot.

For more information on free food and meals, visit [www.bmorechildren.com/food-assistance](http://www.bmorechildren.com/food-assistance).

# COVID-19 EMERGENCY FOOD STRATEGY



Bernard C. "Jack" Young  
Mayor

Six months in...



## To date...

- 10 city agencies
- Dozens of nonprofit & corporate partners
- 100+ community-based organizations



- Map and data analysis
- Community-informed
- Community-driven



 A total of **5.5 million** meals

**150,000** produce boxes

**110,000** grocery boxes

Across **300+** sites

**17,000** home deliveries

**50** community food grants  
(**\$2,500-\$15,000**)



Increase in **SNAP** participation

- March:  
**1 in 4** residents



- June onward:  
**1 in 3** residents



## Core values

Increase food assistance  
to meet need

Provide food supplements across  
age groups and geographic areas

Offer residents food and grocery  
choice

Reach underserved  
residents overlooked by  
mass distribution channels

Retain resident agency and  
dignity

## This fall...

Youth & family meals at  
100+ sites

Produce boxes at 52 sites

Grocery boxes at 9 sites  
& home delivery

Ongoing analysis &  
adjustments to  
strategy as needed



[coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov](https://coronavirus.baltimorecity.gov)