The Texas Legislature meets every two years and in 140 days makes decisions about important issues that impact your life, your work, your family, and the ability of our communities to access food.

The Government Relations Department at Houston Food Bank, in partnership with Feeding Texas and others around the state, worked with elected officials to bring important issues to their attention and advocate for policies to further the fight against hunger and poverty.

This document takes a brief look at the positive changes resulting from the legislative session as well as the work still to be done.

**NUTRITIOUS FOOD FOR FARMERS & FAMILIES**

**What:** The Surplus Agricultural Grant assists food banks in acquiring fresh produce that is unsellable due to imperfections or market conditions. The funds go directly to farmers, offsetting their costs of harvesting, storing, and packaging.

**Why:** The Texas Department of Agriculture consolidated a mandatory 5% budget cut into several grant programs which resulted in a 41% cut ($1.9 million) to the Surplus Agriculture Grant. This resulted in 4,000,000 pounds of produce no longer available to families in HFB’s 18-county service region.

We successfully advocated for the Surplus Agricultural Products Grant to be fully funded for the 2021-2022 biennium and restored to the 2020-2021 budget.
**IMPROVED SNAP ACCESS**

- **What:** In 2018, Texas was one of ten states with the highest food insecurity among seniors.
- **Why:** Texas has low rates of senior enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

**SB 224 waives the recertification interview; reduces size of the application, extends eligibility, and informs seniors on Medicaid they could be eligible for SNAP.**

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**HEALTHY BODIES AND MINDS**

- **HB 4** – requires and funds reimbursement for telemedicine including physical and mental health treatment as well as services for children with special needs. This includes audio-only services. [effective immediately]
- **HB 133** – expands Medicaid coverage for postpartum women up to six months after they give birth. [effective 9/1/21]

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**WORK LEFT UNDONE**

Although HFB and other advocates fought hard to get the following items passed, they didn’t make it. We are already in conversations about how to make this work successful next session!

- **What:** Access to nutritious food, transportation, and adequate housing have a direct impact on health outcomes. It is therefore an essential cost savings strategy for managed care organizations and health providers to invest in these social determinants of health (SDOH).
Why: Medicaid managed care organizations and health providers are not compensated (there aren’t rates of payment) for investing in or providing additional services such as transportation to grocery stores or food pantries, case management to find good child care and employment or other non-clinical services that have a positive impact on health outcomes.

❖ Medicaid Expansion – there were several different bills that sought to expand health coverage to those who don’t qualify for Medicaid but are unable to afford health insurance. Unfortunately, none of these bills were successful; however, there is work being done at the federal level to establish a federal Medicaid program or give counties the option of having their own.

❖ SB 1914 - Although advocates ideally wanted vehicles eliminated from the SNAP asset test (HB 1230), HFB and others ultimately supported this compromise bill that would have set the first and second vehicle limits to inflation.

❖ HB 1353 / SB 1912 - these bills would have restricted sanctions related to SNAP work requirements only to the head of household and not their children.

❖ HB 1367 - would have allowed for vehicles, trailers, or semitrailers to be exempt from registration fees if the vehicles are used exclusively for emergencies, training, equipment maintenance, transportation of disaster relief supplies, or other activities related to disaster relief. HFB will work next session to waive tolls as well.

❖ SB 1602 / HB 1686 - would have prevented Homeowner’s Associations from unduly restricting the ability of families to safely grow their own food and raise/keep domestic fowls or rabbits.

❖ HB 2126 / SB 869 – would have required HHSC to identify college degree programs that are vocational or technical in nature, so students enrolled in these programs could receive SNAP while pursuing their educational and career goals. It also would have continued SNAP benefits during college breaks and in the summer between sessions and defined unpaid work study and internships as work. **HFB is supporting the EATS Act of 2021 in Congress as it would include attending an institution of higher education under the SNAP work definition to increase access to SNAP for college students who would otherwise financially qualify.