



**ATLANTA
COMMUNITY
FOOD BANK**

POLICY BRIEF 2017

A Georgia Work Credit Can Help Families Put Food on the Table

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On any given day in Georgia, hundreds of working families walk through the doors of nonprofit food banks in our communities. A young mom earning minimum wage as a cashier who can't afford child care if she wants enough money left for groceries. A single dad who lost a well-paying construction job in the recession and now must choose between affording food and keeping gas in the car. Nearly 1.8 million Georgians, including 650,970 children, were counted as food insecure in 2014, meaning that they didn't always know where their next meal might come from.



Those on the front lines against hunger in Georgia see the scope of the need every day. The Atlanta Community Food Bank delivers more than 60 million pounds of food and groceries a year to partner agencies across 29 counties in the metro region. Further north in Gainesville, the Georgia Mountain Food Bank provides meals to more than 47,000 hungry people in five North Georgia counties. But a reported-17,500 people each month in the food bank's service area have unmet food needs, forcing them into tough choices between food, rent and other necessities.

Through that work, food bank workers also are familiar with the underlying reasons why so many Georgians go hungry in the first place – the inability to make ends meet. An estimated 59 percent of families who got help from the Atlanta food bank in 2014 had at least one worker in the home. These are hardworking Georgia families striving to ascend the economic ladder, yet still go hungry and are in need of help. It's important to help stave off immediate hunger pangs. Still, fighting the root causes of hunger in the long term will require more policy solutions designed to break the broader cycle of poverty. Families need solutions from policies that can help boost incomes, raise wages and connect workers to better jobs and educational opportunities.

59%

**of households served by the
Food Bank partner agencies
have at least one member
employed in the last year.**

Feeding America – 2014

To that end, anti-hunger advocates are among the staunchest supporters nationwide for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a proven policy to help low-wage workers and their families get on firmer economic footing. Widely viewed as one of the country's most effective tools against poverty, the EITC is a federal tax credit that delivers an extra boost to low-wage workers in the form of a tax refund. Working families with children earning from about \$10,000 to \$25,000 see the largest benefit, though single workers and those closer to the middle class still see some gain.

Here in Georgia, anti-hunger nonprofits are among those helping make the case for lawmakers to enact a state-level version of the credit – the Georgia Work Credit. Creating such a credit would add Georgia to the list of 26 states and the District of Columbia that maximize the value of the EITC by providing a state match. State EITCs serve as a complement to the federal credit, putting up to a few hundred extra dollars a year in the pockets of working families in the form of a state tax refund.

The extra money delivered to taxpayers through a Georgia Work Credit can help stabilize families and guard against the ravages of poverty, including hunger and homelessness. This payoff occurs in two ways. One, the immediate financial boost gives families a better chance to afford day-to-day necessities, including child care, transportation and housing. Second, because state EITC refunds arrive in a lump sum at tax time, they give workers a chance to make larger strategic investments that smooth their path to the middle class, such as paying off debt or buying a reliable car to get to work. Expert research and experience from other states shows that the value of these investments can extend far into the future, since children who grow up in economically stable families are likelier to excel in the classroom, graduate high school, attend college and earn more as adults.

Too many Georgians lay awake hungry at night and don't know where their next meal is coming from. Enacting a state EITC, or Georgia Work Credit, is an achievable strategy for lawmakers to ease the hardships of the working poor. The credit can help hard-working families make ends meet, put food on the table for their children and eventually escape the cycle of poverty.