



Press Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**FOODBANK OF SOUTHEASTERN VIRGINIA EASTERN SHORE BRANCH  
ANNOUNCES RESTRUCTURING PLAN FOR FACILITY  
Thrift Store to Close February 26**

**Onley, VA** – The Eastern Shore branch of the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia has announced that they will be closing the doors of their Thrift Store on February 26, 2016. Focus is being redirected to the organization’s core mission of “leading the effort to eliminate hunger in our community”, and their vision for a “hunger free community.” The decision to close the store was not an easy one; however the need for additional space to grow food distribution while maintaining efficiency and food safety has become a major priority given the increase in food distributed each year over the past three years. Last year, the Eastern Shore Branch distributed over 1.2 million pounds of food to individuals in need.

“In order to best serve the Eastern Shore community, it was determined by the Board of Directors that focusing more significantly on food distribution is the best course of action for the immediate future,” said Paul G. Finch, Board President. “Input from Eastern Shore task force members and various committees weighed in on this difficult decision.”

“As we look toward the future, our top priority is to implement a viable strategy to reduce and eliminate hunger across our service area,” said Ruth Jones Nichols, Chief Executive Officer. “Over the next several months, we will look at how to best position the branch office and our organization as a whole to best meet the needs of our clients. We will gather feedback from Eastern Shore community members to help inform future decisions.”

With food at the forefront of the decision, critical capital improvements will be made to the space previously utilized for the Thrift Store. Top priorities for repair or replacement include expanding food storage areas making them more efficient and safer; replacing the inefficient and aging heating, ventilation

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and air conditioning system; increasing volunteer production space; and resurfacing the warehouse floor. Food safety and handling, efficiency, personnel and client safety are at the heart of the renovations that will begin in March 2016.

“Food safety is paramount when it comes to storing and distributing the quantity of food that passes through our doors daily,” said Renee Figurelle, Chief Operating Officer at the Foodbank. “These necessary repairs will allow us to provide an increased amount of higher quality, nutritious food to residents of the Eastern Shore and allow greater opportunities for volunteers to help with production and food distribution.”

“Even though the closing of the Thrift Store will be difficult, it will allow us to better serve the community by focusing on getting more food out to those in need,” said Charmin Horton, Eastern Shore Branch Manager. “We are excited about the renovations as they will allow for members of the community to be engaged with more hands-on volunteer opportunities such as packing Backpack bags and USDA food boxes. We will continue to provide referral information for families and the general public.”

The Foodbank will be liquidating thrift store stock and will work with other thrift stores in our service area. Anyone looking to donate clothing items, or looking for affordable clothing items to purchase are encouraged to visit Light House Ministries Thrift at 25523 East Main Street in Onley, Hospice Thrift Store at 165 Market Street in Onancock or other local stores across the area.

Food safety is a priority for the Foodbank and as a commitment to keeping the organization to the highest standards, the Eastern Shore branch of the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia recently had a food safety audit performed by the American Institute of Baking (AIB) on Wednesday, January 6<sup>th</sup>. AIB International is an organization committed to protecting the safety of the food supply chain and delivering high value technical and educational programs. The members of the Feeding America™ network of food banks are required to pass this global ‘gold standard’ food safety rating.

The audit provides the Foodbank with a food industry standard containing industry best-practices and legal requirements, which will establish an effective framework for safe food handling. Implementing such a standard has “raised the bar” on food safety, and helps reduce food safety risks to clients and the business of food distribution.

Scoring for the audit is based on adherence of policies concerning five areas of Good Manufacturing Processes: Operational Methods and Personnel Practices, Maintenance for Food Safety, Cleaning Practices, Integrated Pest Management, Adequacy of Prerequisite and Food Safety Programs. The Foodbank received a rating score of 885/1000.

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The branch facility spans approximately 12,000 square feet at the 24530 Coastal Boulevard location in Tasley. The space is comprised of both administrative offices and food storage/distribution warehouse. Last fiscal year 1.9 million pounds of food were distributed to Eastern Shore residents with the hope of ending hunger through our branch's 27 partner agencies and programs.

### **About the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore**

Serving 182,900 individuals annually, the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore, a member of Feeding America® and the Federation of Virginia Food Banks, has been providing food for those facing hunger since 1981. Through fiscal year 2015, we have distributed over 246 million meals throughout our service area, which includes the cities of Norfolk, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, Suffolk, Franklin, and Virginia Beach as well as the counties of Southampton, Northampton, Sussex, Isle of Wight, and Accomack.

For up-to-date information on the Foodbank, find us online at [foodbankonline.org](http://foodbankonline.org); like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/SEVAFoodbank](https://facebook.com/SEVAFoodbank); or follow us on Twitter at [twitter.com/FoodbankSEVA](https://twitter.com/FoodbankSEVA). To give, text FEED to 757-550-3535.

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