

MAKE HUNGER HISTORY.

The Make Hunger History Coalition represents over 200 organizations and over 750 individual members. Together, we imagine a Massachusetts where no family goes hungry, where every child has access to nourishing food, and where hunger is a thing of the past. This vision is within our reach, and Massachusetts is poised to lead the nation in ending food insecurity once and for all.

We believe our State Legislature plays a key role. As such, we solicited all who were not unopposed to answer the following questions.

Name:	Christine Barber
Party:	Democratic
District:	2nd Middlesex
Position Sought:	State Senator
Website:	https://www.christinebarber.org/

What is your connection to or experience with hunger, food security, federal nutrition programs, or the food system, if any?

Candidate Answer: *I currently represent the 34th Middlesex District in Somerville and Medford, and I have witnessed firsthand the impact that food assistance programs have on reducing food insecurity. In my district alone, 10,042 constituents are SNAP recipients, and 16,548 people a month are served by Greater Boston Food Bank partner agencies — including the Mobile Market/Clarendon Hill and Mystic, the Elizabeth Peabody House Food Pantry, the Mystic Community Market in Medford, and Food for Free. Hunger is an injustice that no resident in our state should experience. That's why I prioritize the Project Bread FoodSource Hotline every year as a top budget amendment that I file, and I'm grateful to annually secure \$900,000 that directly helps individuals access SNAP or other federal programs and allows those individuals and families to purchase groceries locally. As Chair of the Joint Committee on the Environment and Natural Resource, I also have championed MEAP (Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program) at the state level, to bring this critical program to its highest funding level ever. This year, I also secured \$50,000 in the state budget for the Carrot Card Program and School Market to provide food assistance to families in Somerville through Food For Free, so that K-12 students and their families can access fresh food*

without extra trips to a food pantry and without stigma. Even just a few weeks ago, I had the privilege of volunteering at the school food market in Somerville, and I saw so many families come through — parents relieved to get fresh produce for their kids and neighbors greeting each other with warmth. This reminded me just how much work there is to do in this space, and that we can support our neighbors with dignity and care in this work.

What do you believe is the role of the state government in ensuring everyone in our state has enough to eat and reducing the demand for emergency food resources?

Candidate Answer: Investments in emergency food resources are essential to meeting immediate need — universal school meals, increases to the Healthy Incentives Program, and increased funding for the Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP) and the Project Bread FoodSource Hotline all help Massachusetts meet the moment at a time of damaging federal neglect, and I've been proud to vote in favor of increased funding for all these programs. But true, sustainable change requires us to address the systemic inequality that drives food insecurity in the first place — the high cost of housing, stagnant wages, the price of childcare, and the racial and economic disparities that leave too many families choosing between rent and groceries. As state leaders, we have a responsibility to our constituents to lead on this — not just to respond to hunger, but to prevent it in the first place. Alleviating this crisis calls for both priorities at once: the immediate relief that emergency food assistance provides, paired with the policy change needed to address these root causes, so fewer families ever find themselves in need of support.

What should the Commonwealth do to ensure robust access to effective anti-hunger programs such as SNAP?

Candidate Answer: I am proud to have co-sponsored the state budget amendment to invest in DTA caseworkers to maintain SNAP access, which secured stronger funding for more caseworkers in both the House and Senate FY27 budgets. DTA is the gateway that connects residents to SNAP, and SNAP is one of the most effective tools we have for fighting hunger — one that also

injects federal dollars directly into our local economy. I will continue advocating for additional investment to make sure DTA has the staffing it needs, because without adequate staffing, DTA cannot address two major problems Massachusetts is facing.

The first is reduced SNAP access for eligible households. When residents can't reach DTA for interviews or to submit documents, the SNAP application and renewal process is halted — causing eligible households to lose out on benefits through no fault of their own.

The second is the risk of costly payment and administrative errors under the federal bill OB3, which requires states to fund a portion of SNAP benefits based on their Payment Error Rate (PER).

To ensure robust, reliable access to effective anti-hunger programs like SNAP, I will continue pushing for funding to secure the DTA caseworker staffing needed. I will also continue to champion the Project Bread FoodSource Hotline to ensure that families and individuals get support and assistance in getting the most food benefits possible.

As a member of the Massachusetts legislature, would you advocate for state funds to hire the staff necessary to ensure every eligible low-income resident successfully accesses federally-funded nutrition benefits?

Candidate Answer: Yes, I have been a strong advocate for state funding for nutrition benefits and would absolutely continue to do so. When someone is experiencing an extremely stressful, vulnerable moment, they deserve every resource to ensure access to the benefits they need. That's why I have prioritized funding for the FoodSource Hotline every year — the only statewide, confidential, toll-free call center connecting residents to food resources in over 180 languages. It connects individuals and families to emergency food sources and helps them understand and navigate eligibility for federal food assistance programs like SNAP. In addition to helping households navigate the SNAP application process and understand eligibility, the Hotline connects callers to community-based resources such as food pantries and meal programs, and provides guidance on federal nutrition programs like WIC, Summer EBT, and Meals on Wheels. It plays a critical role in relieving pressure on state systems by fielding questions,

prescreening applicants, and offering multilingual support that many state agencies cannot provide directly.

I would also use all resources – including raising revenue by taxing corporations not paying their fair share – to ensure the state has adequate resources to hire staff at DTA and in other programs like MDAR to secure staffing that ensures that families are able to access benefits for critical anti-hunger programs.

This is a duty I take seriously — not just a value, but tangible action for those who need it most.

While hunger is a statewide issue that impacts a variety of demographics, certain populations experience it at disproportionately higher rates. For example, Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, immigrants, members of LGBTQ+ community, and people with disabilities experience hunger at disproportionately higher rates.

What do you believe are the primary factors driving these disparities, and what can government do to reduce them?

Candidate Answer: *These disparities are driven by systemic economic inequality — persistent wage gaps, structural discrimination in housing and employment, transit barriers, and restricted access to social safety nets. Food deserts, including in this district, play a huge role as well, leaving entire communities without reliable access to affordable, healthy food, regardless of whether residents can otherwise afford it.*

Government has a responsibility to address these disparities directly. That means investing in affordable, accessible public transit so that transportation is never the barrier between someone and a grocery store or a food pantry. I have filed a bill for fare-free buses and fought for the Green Line Extension and adequate bus service. It also means advancing pay equity — I was proud to pass a law establishing salary and wage transparency, which includes reporting requirements that track wage data by race and gender, so we can measure these disparities over time rather than relying on assumptions. Quantifying these disparities helps address them at an effective scale, whether through targeted funding or shifts in policy, and by centering the voices of those most affected in the development of that policy from the start.

Making sure that targeted aid actually reaches the people it's meant for should be the focus of any change. That requires having persistent conversations with affected communities, genuinely listening, and using what we learn as the foundation for our legislative work.

What else would you like to share about your plans to address food insecurity and its root causes?

Candidate Answer: The Mystic Community Market in Medford, in my House district, opened its doors in February 2020. Within a month, the Market became a lifeline for families in my district and across the region as COVID upended lives and depleted incomes. I worked closely with the leadership of the Market – not only volunteering to deliver food to seniors and people with disabilities, but also helping them to secure the funding they needed to build out their program to meet an immense need. That need has only grown since COVID, as income inequality, systemic racism, housing costs, and the affordability crisis persist and grow. As a legislator, I do my job best by listening to people in the community, and responding to those needs. I am grateful for the state and local partners who are tackling food insecurity, and all that I continue to learn in working with them on the ground to address hunger.