

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:	Joe Espinola
Party:	Independent
District:	1st Middlesex
Position Sought:	State Senator
Website:	Joe4Change.com

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

Candidate Answer: *My connection to hunger and food security comes from decades of public service, community involvement, and volunteer work throughout the Merrimack Valley. During my career as a Lowell police officer, particularly through my work with families and young people, I saw firsthand how prevalent hunger and food insecurity can be. Police officers often encounter families during difficult moments, and I learned early in my career that what may appear to be one problem is often connected to something much larger. Families struggling with housing, employment, transportation, or other financial pressures were also sometimes struggling simply to keep enough food in the house. Those experiences gave me an understanding of food insecurity long before I became involved with food assistance organizations directly. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I volunteered at numerous food distribution events and food banks, including with the Merrimack Valley Food Bank, working alongside Amy Pessia and Debbie Callery. COVID made food insecurity even more visible as families, seniors, veterans, and working people who may never have needed assistance before suddenly found themselves relying on community food programs.*

I have also spent many years working with and supporting nonprofit organizations throughout the Merrimack Valley, both professionally and personally. Through that involvement, I have seen the tremendous work nonprofits, volunteers, food banks, and community organizations do every day, but I also understand that they cannot carry this responsibility alone. As a State Senator, I would bring those real-world experiences to Beacon Hill. I believe we must protect access to nutrition programs, support our food banks and community partners, and address the underlying economic pressures that contribute to food insecurity. No child should struggle to learn because they are hungry, no senior should have to choose between food and other necessities, and no working family should be ashamed to ask for help when they need it. Food security is not only about addressing hunger; it is about dignity, opportunity, and building stronger communities.

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: I believe state government has a fundamental responsibility to create the conditions where individuals and families can afford the basic necessities of life, including enough nutritious food. Food banks and community pantries do tremendous work, but they were created to respond to emergencies and fill gaps, not to become a permanent food system for thousands of Massachusetts families.

The fact that so many households are experiencing food insecurity tells us that hunger cannot be addressed through food distribution alone. We need to address the reasons people are walking through the doors of food pantries in the first place. The high cost of housing, childcare, utilities, transportation, healthcare, and groceries can leave working families, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities making impossible choices about which necessities they can afford. Massachusetts should protect and strengthen programs that are already making a difference, including universal free school meals, the Healthy Incentives Program, SNAP access and outreach, and support for our regional food banks and local food assistance organizations. We should also continue looking for ways to connect Massachusetts families with healthy, locally produced food while supporting our farmers and local economy.



My years in law enforcement and community service taught me that effective public policy should address problems before they become crises. The same principle applies to hunger. A family should not have to reach an emergency before we help them become stable.

As a State Senator, I would support policies that address both immediate hunger and its underlying causes. Success should not be measured by how much emergency food we distribute, but by how many fewer families need emergency food in the first place. Massachusetts has the resources and ability to work toward a Commonwealth where children can learn without hunger, seniors can live with dignity, and working families can afford to put nutritious food on the table.

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

Candidate Answer: SNAP is one of our most important tools for fighting hunger, and the Commonwealth has a responsibility to make sure eligible residents can actually access and maintain those benefits. When 77% of calls requiring assistance from a caseworker end without the caller being connected, that is not simply an inconvenience. For a family trying to put food on the table, it can mean losing or delaying benefits they depend on.

Massachusetts should make improving access to the Department of Transitional Assistance a priority. That means ensuring DTA has adequate staffing and resources, improving response times and technology, providing multiple ways for residents to communicate with caseworkers, and making sure seniors, people with disabilities, working families, and residents with language or technology barriers are not left behind. We should also strengthen partnerships with community organizations that already help residents navigate SNAP and other nutrition programs.

My years in public service have taught me that a program is only effective when the people it was created to serve can actually access it. We also need accountability. If residents consistently cannot reach a caseworker, state government should identify why, establish measurable standards for improvement, and make those results transparent.

With food costs continuing to rise and so many children among those losing SNAP benefits, we cannot allow administrative barriers to contribute to hunger.



As a State Senator, I would support protecting SNAP access, improving DTA customer service and staffing, and making sure Massachusetts is maximizing every available federal nutrition dollar. SNAP should work alongside our state nutrition programs and food assistance network, while our larger goal remains reducing the number of families who need emergency food assistance in the first place.

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. As a member of the Massachusetts Legislature, I would advocate for sufficient state funding to ensure the Department of Transitional Assistance has the staffing necessary to help every eligible low-income resident access the federal nutrition benefits available to them.

Massachusetts should not leave federal nutrition dollars on the table because residents cannot reach a caseworker or navigate the system. These benefits bring federal resources into our communities, help families afford food, and reduce pressure on food banks and local pantries that are already working hard to meet increasing demand.

I believe this is both a human issue and a matter of responsible government. If someone qualifies for assistance, particularly a child, senior, person with a disability, or family struggling financially, an understaffed state agency should not be the reason they go without food.

I would support appropriate staffing, improved accessibility and technology, and accountability for timely service. We should also work with community organizations that help residents navigate these programs. Our goal should be simple: eligible residents receive the benefits available to them, food reaches the people who need it, and emergency food providers can focus on emergencies rather than filling gaps created by an inaccessible system.

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: *I believe the primary factors driving these disparities are interconnected: the cost of housing, wages that have not kept pace with the cost of living, barriers to employment and transportation, healthcare and childcare costs, disability-related challenges, language and cultural barriers, and difficulty accessing government programs. Discrimination and longstanding inequities can compound these challenges for certain communities, making food insecurity more likely and making it harder for people to recover when they experience financial hardship.*

Throughout my years in law enforcement and community service, I worked with people from every background and saw that hunger does not discriminate. At the same time, I recognize that some communities face additional barriers that make them more vulnerable to food insecurity. Government should recognize those disparities while ensuring that assistance is accessible, respectful, and based on need.

We can reduce hunger by addressing both the immediate need for food and the economic conditions that cause food insecurity. That means protecting SNAP and other nutrition programs, maintaining universal school meals, improving access to DTA services, supporting people with disabilities and seniors, addressing the high costs of housing, childcare and healthcare, and ensuring that language, transportation, technology, or immigration concerns do not unnecessarily prevent eligible residents from accessing assistance.

I also believe government needs to listen to the community organizations that work directly with these populations. Food banks, local pantries, schools, social service agencies, and community nonprofits often see problems before government does and can help identify where programs are falling short.

Ultimately, reducing these disparities means creating a system where people are treated with dignity and have a fair opportunity to achieve stability and self-sufficiency. Our goal should be to make sure that no person in Massachusetts goes hungry because of who they are, where they come from, a disability, or an inability to navigate a complicated system.

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

Candidate Answer: Food insecurity is not an issue I would address only when a bill involving hunger comes before the Legislature. I see it as part of a much larger challenge facing Massachusetts families: the rising cost of simply living here.

Throughout my career in law enforcement, community service, nonprofit work, and volunteering at food distributions, I have seen people during some of the most difficult moments of their lives. Those experiences taught me that hunger is rarely an isolated problem. Behind the need for food may be a family struggling with rent, a senior living on a fixed income, a veteran trying to regain stability, a person with a disability facing additional expenses, or working parents trying to keep up with food, childcare, utilities, healthcare, and housing.

My approach would be both immediate and long-term. We need to protect programs that keep people fed today, including SNAP access, universal school meals, the Healthy Incentives Program, and support for food banks and community organizations. We also need to address the root causes that bring people to emergency food programs: housing affordability, wages, childcare, healthcare, transportation, and access to effective state services.

I also believe strongly in listening to the people doing this work every day. As a State Senator, I would maintain relationships with food banks, pantries, schools, municipalities, farmers, nonprofits, and most importantly, the residents experiencing food insecurity themselves. Good policy should be shaped by what is actually happening in our communities, not just by what we hear on Beacon Hill.

I have spent much of my life in public service, and I believe government is at its best when it helps people through difficult times while creating opportunities for them to become stable and self-sufficient. Emergency food programs will always have an important role, but our goal should be fewer families needing them. I would bring that perspective with me to the State Senate and work across party lines to make Massachusetts more affordable and ensure that no child, senior, veteran, person with a disability, or working family has to wonder where their next meal will come from.