

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.

Our representatives in Congress play a key role. As such, we solicited answer to the following questions.

Name:	Jeromie Whalen
Party:	Democratic
District:	First
Website:	www.whalenforcongressma.com

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

Candidate Answer: In the fall, I walked 43 miles as part of the March for the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. That experience was incredibly informative and helped me understand the issue of food insecurity more deeply. As I've traveled throughout this district, and from my own experience growing up here, I've heard countless stories about how significant food insecurity continues to be for our communities.

In particular, my time as a high school teacher has shown me all too well the effect hunger can have on students' ability to make it through the school day comfortably. When universal school meals came into the fold, it was like night and day. This was especially true for students who no longer had to face the stigma of being identified as receiving free or reduced-price meals. Instead, I was lucky enough to clean maple syrup off the desks of students who could simply get breakfast without any questions asked. When COVID hit, I helped make sure students still had access to food by going with other members of the NHS community to deliver it directly to them. I enjoy volunteering at Rachel's Table, have sorted vegetables with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, and have volunteered with other organizations doing this kind of on-the-ground and in-the-community work every day.

A lot of people come together to make these things work, but it shouldn't take an entire community to guarantee something as simple and fundamental as food. The government needs to be doing more.

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

Candidate Answer: We are lucky to have a champion on this issue right next door to my district: Congressman Jim McGovern. I intend to be a partner in the fight to end hunger and food insecurity alongside him in Congress. I'll be joining the Hunger Caucus in the House and co-sponsoring legislation that would deliver the solutions people need on day one.

A few specific pieces of legislation stand out to me. First is Congressman McGovern's "Feeding Families Not Fear Act," which would slash the additional funding given to ICE's terror campaign and redirect those funds to fill in the cuts to SNAP caused by Trump's Big BS Bill. I also support the "Universal School Meals Program Act of 2026" to bring the work Massachusetts has done to the national level.

I also think we need to get creative with solutions. Too often, we find ourselves just trying to reverse harm and get back to the bare minimum. We need to restore the cuts to SNAP and then expand funding for SNAP. We need to ensure universal school meals and then make those meals the best and healthiest they can be for students. We need to make sure food banks have the resources they need and then take steps to address food insecurity so effectively that food banks become an additional resource, rather than the sole supporting beam of a crumbling infrastructure, as they currently are.

There is also an incredible opportunity to bring our local farmers into this work so the food people receive is local, rather than coming from a freezer truck from hundreds of miles away. We also need legislation and solutions that approach this with a community-to-community approach. Every place has different needs, and addressing food insecurity needs to be done in an equitable way to ensure the best results for everyone.

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

Candidate Answer: *We can start with funding them. Then expand that funding even more. However, as we know, just funding something can't be the full solution if we want it to be sustainable. Increased efforts need to be made to bring every stakeholder in communities to the table. When I think about Western and Central Mass in particular, that includes continuing to speak with local farms and farmers to see what they need to do the community-based work they often do and how to incorporate their goods into these programs more.*

As a member of Congress, would you advocate to ensure every eligible household is able to receive SNAP with minimal bureaucratic hurdles?

Candidate Answer: *Yes, the government should be the first partner to households in combating food insecurity, not getting in the way of people receiving the resources they need.*

Would you advocate for SNAP eligibility or benefits amounts to be expanded?

Candidate Answer: *Yes. With all ten toes on the ground. We need to restore the funding that was there immediately and then expand it. This is an emergency.*

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: *As always, it starts with a lack of funding, specifically for areas with large populations of marginalized people. In a nation with a current administration that is levying attacks on these populations daily, those attacks,*

whether directly or indirectly, contribute to food insecurity as well. A lack of public transportation affects someone's ability to get to a food bank or grocery store. Harmful practices in public safety or public programs can hinder someone's comfort in seeking out additional resources. Not properly funding our schools correlates with attendance rates, which means kids are not always getting universal school meals, even if their state has them. Buildings that provide food assistance not being fully ADA-compliant, as well as websites lacking accessibility, impact someone's ability to actually get the support they need. ICE abducting people off the streets and murdering people in broad daylight makes people less likely to leave their homes, be in community, or access the resources that are available to them.

We need to push back against every one of Trump's attacks, expand fast, accessible, and free public transportation to every ZIP code, reform certain training and practices while expanding community-based supports, fully fund our public schools, ensure resource centers are accessible to everyone, and abolish ICE. There also needs to be constant communication and involvement with every community to understand what they need, rather than only going to the communities that come out to vote during election season.

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

Candidate Answer: Appreciate all the work you are doing and hope to be a partner every step of the way alongside you!