

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:	John Beccia
Party:	Democratic
District:	Sixth
Website:	becciaforcongress.com

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

Candidate Answer: *I have not experienced hunger in my own life, and I am not going to tell you otherwise. Food insecurity is central to this campaign because it is what I keep hearing.*

Over the course of this campaign I have visited all 39 cities and towns in this district and people told me the same thing: Groceries are busting household budgets. On May 14, I convened a food insecurity roundtable in Lynn with leaders from 12 of the district's food pantries and hunger relief organizations. And their situation is dire: demand is through the roof, federal support has evaporated, and state caseworkers are overworked.

My career was spent in financial regulation and consumer protection, which is mostly the work of making sure rules serve the people for whom they were written. That is the problem here too. No Empty Shelves came out of those conversations, and it is the first plan in my agenda for a reason.

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: *The federal government is the only actor operating at the scale of this problem, and right now it is making the problem worse. For every meal an emergency food program provides, SNAP provides nine. Pantries were built to carry a family through a bad month, not a permanent shortfall. This federal funding goes beyond just putting food on shelves, but buoys our entire economy. SNAP also brings roughly \$2.7 billion in federal dollars into Massachusetts every year and moves nearly \$3 billion through more than 5,500 retailers. The federal role has three parts. The first is funding these programs: SNAP, WIC, school meals, summer meals, Meals on Wheels, and the Farm Bill nutrition title. Second is getting the benefit right, so it reflects what a healthy diet actually costs in a state this expensive. And third is to stop manufacturing emergencies, which is why my plan creates an automatic federal backstop so benefits never lapse in a shutdown. Reducing demand on pantries also means going after what causes the shortfall: rent, child care, utility bills, and wages that have not kept up.*

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

Candidate Answer: *First and foremost, repeal the SNAP provisions in last year's reconciliation law. Those provisions mandated work requirements onto adults up to age 64 and onto parents of children as young as 14; stripped the exemptions that protected veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and young people aging out of foster care; limited hardship waivers to areas with unemployment above 10 percent, a bar no state in the country currently clears; and cut off refugees and asylees who were here lawfully. In a single year, more than 150,000 Massachusetts residents lost their SNAP benefits, including tens of thousands of children. This crisis is compounded by the fact that 40 percent of households in the state are already food insecure. These draconian cuts were done in the name of "rooting out fraud," but the reality is that bureaucratic hurdles were created to kick people off of these immensely important programs. Congress also has to pay for what it mandates. Prior to these cuts, the Department of Agriculture covered half of all administrative costs. But the reconciliation bill cut this funding by 50 percent, while also dramatically increasing the reporting workload on an already*

threadbare staff. I would restore the federal match and hold the federal government to real service standards, including language access.

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.

Too many eligible families are going hungry because of red tape. More than 75 percent of Massachusetts callers who need a caseworker never reach one.

Eligibility that exists on paper and not in practice is not eligibility.

What I would push for: longer certification periods; verification through data the government already holds rather than documents families have to chase down; an end to making people prove the same unchanged circumstances every six months; real language access at every step; and administrative funding that matches the complexity Congress writes into the law rather than the cut to the federal match that takes effect in October.

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

Candidate Answer: Yes, both.

Regarding eligibility, the first job is restoring what Congress just took away, meaning the refugees and asylum seekers who were cut off despite being here lawfully, and the older adults and parents of teenagers now caught by work reporting rules that punish people whose hours change week to week. From there, I would expand. In a state where 40 percent of households report food insecurity, an eligibility line that leaves out most of them is drawn in the wrong place.

As for benefits, the amount should be tied to inflation and the real cost of groceries. An average benefit of roughly \$11 a day per household is not near enough to feed a family in my district.

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 gaps are structural. They follow the labor market, the housing market, and the design of the programs themselves, not the choices of the people living inside them.*

Work comes first. Black, Latino, immigrant, and disabled workers are disproportionately concentrated in the jobs that pay least and have variable scheduling. Work reporting rules punish exactly that volatility, because a month at 76 hours instead of 80 becomes a termination notice. Then comes housing and wealth disparities. Basic essentials like food and housing comes first, which takes up a majority of each paycheck. Too many families are living in financially tenuous situations, due to generations of discriminatory housing, lending, and work practices, leaving them no option but to live paycheck-to-paycheck, with nothing to fall back on.

Then status. Congress cut off refugees and asylees who came here legally, and the fear that followed keeps eligible-mixed status families from applying. Then access. Right now, the Department of Transitional Assistance customer service line drops three out of every four calls when the caller needs interpretation. Hundreds of thousands more have disabilities and mobility issues that make simple errands outside the house impossible. LGBTQ+ people, especially trans people and young people pushed out of their homes, face discrimination at work and household rules written for a family that will take them in.

The government's job is to dismantle those barriers, not catalog them. Restore immigrant eligibility, end the work reporting rules, fund staffing and interpretation, enforce civil rights law in how these programs are run, and collect disaggregated data, because a disparity nobody measures is a disparity nobody fixes.

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

Candidate Answer: *Two things.*

No Empty Shelves is one of the signature plans in the North Shore New Deal. It protects SNAP and the Farm Bill nutrition title, reverses the cuts coming out of Washington, creates a federal backstop so benefits never lapse in a shutdown, restores federal support for local food purchasing so food banks can buy from North Shore farms, funds cold storage and regional food hubs, and protects school meals, summer meals, and Meals on Wheels.

And the root causes, because hunger here is a symptom of an affordability crisis. Nobody described their grocery bill to me in isolation. They described it alongside rent, child care, a utility bill, and a paycheck that has not moved in years. The hunger answer and the cost of living answer are the same answer: build housing, make child care affordable, make the expanded Child Tax Credit permanent, guarantee paid family and medical leave, and end the tariffs raising the price of groceries.