

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:	Celina A Reyes
Party:	Democratic
District:	16th Essex
Position Sought:	State Representative
Website:	celinareyes.com

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

Candidate Answer: For more than 20 years as an early childhood educator, and through my service as a Lawrence City Councilor and leader representing family child care educators, I have seen firsthand how food insecurity affects children, working families, seniors, and our communities.

In early education, we understand that access to nutritious food is directly connected to a child's health, development, ability to learn, and overall well-being. I have worked with families facing the difficult reality of rising costs for food, housing, child care, health care, and other basic necessities. I have also seen how important federal and state nutrition programs, school meals, and community-based food resources are in helping families make ends meet.

My experience has strengthened my belief that no child or family in Massachusetts should have to worry about where their next meal will come from. As a State Representative, I would work to protect and strengthen programs that address food insecurity, expand access to nutritious food, and ensure that working families can access the resources they need with dignity.

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 both a responsibility and an opportunity to ensure that every resident has reliable access to nutritious food. No family should have to depend on an emergency food pantry simply because the cost of housing, child care, health care, utilities, and groceries has become unaffordable.*

Massachusetts should focus on preventing hunger before families reach a crisis. That means protecting and strengthening programs such as SNAP and WIC, continuing access to universal school meals, supporting food assistance and nutrition programs for children, seniors, and people with disabilities, and making it easier for eligible families to access the benefits available to them.

We must also address the root causes of food insecurity by expanding affordable housing and child care, supporting good-paying jobs and economic opportunities, and reducing the overall cost of living for working families.

Emergency food providers are essential community partners, but they should not have to serve as our primary response to hunger. As a State Representative, I would work toward a Massachusetts where families have the resources and stability to purchase the food they need with dignity and where emergency food resources can truly be reserved for emergencies.

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

Candidate Answer: *The Commonwealth must make it easier, not harder, for eligible residents to access SNAP and other nutrition programs. Massachusetts should invest in adequate staffing at the Department of Transitional Assistance, reduce wait times and application delays, strengthen multilingual and in-person assistance, and simplify application and recertification processes.*

We should also strengthen partnerships with schools, early education programs, senior centers, food assistance organizations, and trusted community-based organizations that can help families understand and access available benefits. At a time when food and other living costs continue to rise, we must ensure that

eligible families do not lose critical nutrition assistance because of administrative barriers.

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 would advocate for state funding to ensure that the Department of Transitional Assistance has the staffing and resources necessary to serve residents effectively.

If Massachusetts residents qualify for federally funded nutrition benefits, they should not lose access because they cannot reach a caseworker or because the system is understaffed. Investing state resources to help eligible residents access federal benefits is fiscally responsible and, most importantly, helps ensure that children, seniors, individuals with disabilities, and working families have reliable access to nutritious food.

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 interconnected barriers, including income and wealth inequality, high housing and child care costs, unequal access to employment opportunities, transportation challenges, language barriers, discrimination, disability-related barriers, and difficulties navigating public benefit systems.

Government must address both immediate food insecurity and the conditions that cause it. That means protecting and expanding access to SNAP, WIC, school meals, and other nutrition programs while also investing in affordable housing,

accessible and affordable child care, good-paying jobs, transportation, and health care.

We must also ensure that state programs are accessible to everyone who qualifies, including people with disabilities and residents with limited English proficiency. Strong multilingual outreach and partnerships with trusted community organizations can help ensure that families know what resources are available and can access them with dignity.

Our goal should not simply be to manage hunger, but to remove the barriers that cause some communities to experience it at

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

Candidate Answer: Food insecurity does not exist in isolation. When families are spending too much of their income on housing, child care, health care, utilities, and transportation, there is less money available for nutritious food.

As an early childhood educator for more than 20 years, a City Councilor, and an advocate for working families, I have seen how these pressures affect families and children in our communities. I believe we need a comprehensive approach that protects nutrition programs while addressing the underlying cost-of-living crisis.

As a State Representative, I would work to protect and strengthen SNAP and other nutrition programs, preserve access to school meals, expand affordable child care and housing, support good-paying jobs, and ensure state agencies have the staffing and resources necessary to connect residents with benefits for which they are eligible.

Massachusetts has the resources and capacity to lead. I will work with colleagues, community organizations, educators, advocates, and families toward a Commonwealth where no child goes to school hungry, no senior has to choose between food and medicine, and working families have the economic stability they need to thrive.