

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:	Jen Heck
Party:	Democratic
District:	18th Worcester
Position Sought:	State Representative
Website:	https://www.heckyeah2026.org/

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

Candidate Answer: My connection is professional/academic (reviewing policy in preparation for this role, including studying food security policies through the Harvard PLC program). I have also worked as a volunteer in shelters and at food banks over the years. Most recently, I assisted my elementary-aged daughter with a food drive for the local food pantry; she organized a food drive in response to federal cuts to aid last year and early this year.

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 the state is the shield in situations like this. In a prosperous, thriving country like the U.S., vulnerable citizens should not starve. I believe it's our civic and moral duty to assist on both a federal and a state level. The barrier to aid isn't money, it's prioritization--and the unfortunate politicization of poverty.

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

Candidate Answer: *The Commonwealth's job is twofold: push back against federal policies that unnecessarily reduce access to benefits for eligible residents, and fix what's within our control by making DTA work better. That means fully staffing the agency, improving phone access, and investing in modern digital tools that make it easier to apply, renew, and communicate with caseworkers. California's GetCalFresh platform is one model to look to for both efficiency and cost savings. It cut the time to get benefits by about 75% and helped raise the state's SNAP participation rate from 66% to 81%, without sacrificing program integrity. Massachusetts should learn from proven models like that, set clear performance benchmarks for DTA, and make sure eligible families aren't losing food assistance because of paperwork, long wait times, or systems that are harder to navigate than they need to be.*

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*

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: *The common thread is that these communities face more barriers to accessing benefits they're already eligible for. Housing and wage disparities leave many families with less financial cushion, some immigrant families avoid applying because they fear immigration consequences, LGBTQ+ residents experience higher rates of housing instability, and people with disabilities often encounter systems that weren't designed with accessibility in*



mind. Government's job is to remove those barriers. That means translating materials, providing qualified interpreters, designing accessible applications, making clear that applying for nutrition assistance does not trigger immigration enforcement, and partnering with trusted community organizations to help eligible residents enroll. We should publish participation and performance data so we can measure what's working, and continue modernizing DTA with proven approaches like California's GetCalFresh, which dramatically reduced wait times and improved access. SNAP benefits are federally funded, so helping every eligible resident enroll brings federal dollars into Massachusetts while creating a more efficient system over time.

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

Candidate Answer: As a filmmaker, I plan to use my storytelling and media skills to explore this issue (and all issues i care about) to reframe the conversation for the public. Legislators pass laws, but culture determines political will.