

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:	Michelle Badger
Party:	Democratic
District:	1st Plymouth
Position Sought:	State Representative
Website:	badgerforplymouth.com

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

Candidate Answer: My commitment to addressing food insecurity began before I was elected to the Legislature but one example. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I volunteered to transport food from the South Shore Community Action Council to our local school, which was coordinating food distribution for residents in need.

During my first term, improving food security and nutrition has remained a priority. In January 2025, I attended an event where a panelist from Plymouth spoke about food insecurity and shared how isolated she felt in addressing the issue locally. After the event, I spoke with her and committed to bringing everyone to the table. Representative LaNatra and I convened local food pantries, South Shore Community Action Council, Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital-Plymouth, churches, the Plymouth Public Schools, and other organizations for a roundtable discussion to better understand the challenges facing our community and identify ways to collaborate. That initial meeting has since evolved into a quarterly coalition where organizations continue to share resources, discuss challenges, and strengthen coordination. The collaboration has significantly improved communication and support among participating organizations.

My office has also helped countless individuals and families access SNAP benefits and connect with other nutrition and financial assistance programs they either did not know they qualified for or were struggling to navigate.

I have also made improving access to nutritious school meals a legislative priority. Working with the Celiac Disease Foundation, I filed H.5012 to ensure Massachusetts truly fulfills its promise of universal free school meals. While the Commonwealth has made tremendous progress by providing free breakfast and lunch—saving families an estimated \$1,200 to \$1,400 each year—students with celiac disease or serious food allergies do not have the same consistent access to safe meal information across school districts. My legislation would help ensure that every child, regardless of where they attend school or their dietary needs, can safely participate in the universal school meals program.

To further expand my knowledge and advocacy in this area, I joined the Food System Caucus, where I have gained a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities within our food system. I look forward to continuing this work in the next legislative session to strengthen food security, improve access to nutritious meals, and ensure that every family has the resources they need to thrive.

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: Government has a responsibility to think creatively and act thoughtfully to ensure that every resident has access to the nutritious food they need. Reducing food insecurity requires more than responding to hunger in a crisis—it requires investing in solutions that prevent people from needing emergency resources in the first place.

That is why I have made improving access to nutritious meals a legislative priority and have filed two specific pieces of legislation focused on expanding food access.

Working with the Celiac Disease Foundation, I filed H.5012 to ensure Massachusetts truly fulfills its promise of universal free school meals. The Commonwealth has made tremendous progress by providing free breakfast and lunch to students, saving families an estimated \$1,200 to \$1,400 each year. However, students with celiac disease or serious food allergies do not always



have consistent access to safe meal information across school districts. This legislation would help ensure that every child, regardless of where they attend school or their dietary needs, can safely participate in the universal school meals program.

I also filed H.4039, An Act relative to universal breakfast and lunch at senior centers, because we know how important proper nutrition is to the health, independence, and quality of life of our older residents. Ensuring seniors have access to nutritious meals is an important part of supporting our aging population and reducing food insecurity.

We must also continue investing in successful programs like the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), which supports both residents and local farmers by helping individuals access fresh, healthy food while strengthening our local agricultural economy.

The state's role is to be a partner—working with communities, schools, senior centers, farmers, and food providers to build a stronger food system where fewer people need emergency assistance because they have consistent access to nutritious food.

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

Candidate Answer: Like many state programs designed to help residents access the important resources they need and deserve, it is far too common for State Representatives, like myself, to receive calls from constituents who need help navigating the system, cutting through red tape, or using what I often call a “back door” connection to access services because they have been waiting for weeks and even months for help. That should not be how government works.

Residents should not have to know to call their State Representative or State Senator in order to receive benefits they qualify for. Our programs should be accessible, understandable, and designed to help people—not create additional barriers.

The Commonwealth needs to invest in the staff and systems that support programs like SNAP, including increasing the number of people who answer the phones and assist residents through the application process. We also need to better understand where the challenges exist by evaluating the process,

identifying the sticking points, and making improvements that reduce unnecessary delays and confusion.

Programs like SNAP are critical resources for individuals and families facing food insecurity, and we must continue to support them in a responsible and sustainable way. Investing in these programs means investing in healthier communities, stronger families, and a more effective government that delivers for the people it serves.

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 ensuring that the Commonwealth has the staffing and resources necessary to help eligible residents successfully access federally funded nutrition benefits.

Programs like SNAP provide critical support for individuals and families, but those resources only work if people can navigate the system and receive the benefits they qualify for. Too often, we hear from residents who need help cutting through red tape or resolving issues with applications and access. While I am always willing to help constituents, it should not require reaching out to an elected official to access a program that someone is already eligible for or to find out if you are eligible.

The Commonwealth should invest in the staff, training, and systems needed to make these programs more efficient and accessible. We should also evaluate where delays and barriers exist within the process and identify ways to improve the experience for residents and the state employees who support these programs.

Ensuring that eligible residents can access nutrition benefits is not only the right thing to do, it is a smart investment in healthier communities.

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: Hunger is a complex issue with many contributing factors, including income inequality, the rising cost of living, transportation costs and challenges, food deserts, and systemic barriers that can make it difficult for residents to access the resources they need.

Government has an important role in addressing these challenges by ensuring that programs designed to support residents are accessible, equitable, and responsive to the needs of the people they serve. That means reducing barriers to programs like SNAP, supporting community-based organizations that have strong relationships with residents, and ensuring that resources are reaching the communities that need them most.

We also need to continue investing in solutions that address the root causes of hunger, including affordable housing, reliable transportation, workforce opportunities, and access to healthcare. Food insecurity does not exist in isolation. When a family is struggling with housing costs, transportation challenges, or other basic needs, putting nutritious food on the table becomes even more difficult. We know that these social determinants of health play a critical role in overall health, stability, and quality of life.

As a state, we must listen to the communities most impacted, continue partnering with organizations doing this work every day, and make sure our policies reflect the diverse needs of our residents. Every person in Massachusetts deserves access to nutritious food, and our goal should be to create systems that make that possible with dignity, respect, and without unnecessary barriers.

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

Candidate Answer: Addressing food insecurity requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond emergency food assistance and focuses on creating systems that allow every resident to thrive. We are so fortunate to have so many food pantries, meal programs, and community organizations that play such a critical role in supporting our neighbors today, but we also need to address the underlying causes as discussed in the prior question like affordability, housing,

transportation, and healthcare. These investments lead to a healthier Massachusetts.

We as a State need to continue to invest in programs that we know work, like SNAP, the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), universal school meals, and other initiatives that connect residents with nutritious food while supporting local communities and farmers. When we do this we also need to make these programs easy to navigate using things like H.5012 and H. 4039 that I have filed and ensuring that people can access what they need and be helped in navigating the process to get the resources.

We also must continue listening to the organizations and residents who are on the front lines of this issue every day. The best solutions come from partnerships between government, nonprofits, schools, senior centers, farmers, and community organizations that understand needs and the issues.