

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:	Natalie Higgins
Party:	Democratic
District:	4th Worcester
Position Sought:	State Representative
Website:	www.ElectNatalieHiggins.com

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

Candidate Answer: Grateful to partner with incredible local organizations working to end hunger (e.g., Ginny's Helping Hand, Spanish American Center, and Catholic Charities) as well as Growing Places, in their work to build out stronger food systems across North Central Mass, securing critical state funding investments.

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: In a state with as much wealth as Massachusetts, no resident should be worried about where they will get their next meal. I support our local food pantries with MEFAP, expanding our local food systems (e.g., Growing Places), and investments in SNAP and HIP are critical to enable our residents to purchase food for their households. I proudly support the Lift Our Kids campaign, to lift our families out of deep poverty in Massachusetts. I am glad that Massachusetts has continued to guarantee free school meals for our K-12 students.

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

Candidate Answer: We need to ensure that the Department of Transitional Assistance has the resources and staffing it needs to properly manage the SNAP caseload (especially with increased burdens regarding the recertification processes). We need to ensure HIP is fully funded, and help connect SNAP recipients to the HIP vendors locally. We're lucky to have Growing Places in North Central Mass that helps bring fresh produce right to your door. I've also had more success in signing up elders for SNAP because of the Healthy Incentives Program!

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: Absolutely. We need to ensure that the DTA has adequate staff to help residents access these critical benefits. I know first hand how challenging the (re)certification processes can be for our residents and families, helping complete applications and submit supportive documentation.

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: We need to continue to tackle the deep and pervasive economic inequities that persist across our Commonwealth. For more than a decade, as a legislator and a nonprofit leader, I have advocated for free and accessible public higher education as one way to create more financial opportunities. Our state government can continue to invest in public transit and accessibility of offices like the DTA. Representing a Gateway City, supportive



programs and resources may not be as accessible as they appear -- especially when many of the offices are located in other communities, and often inaccessible by siloed regional transit systems. When there is access to services in Fitchburg -- it can take Leominster residents more than 2 hours round trip on public transit to access those supports.

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

Candidate Answer: I am incredibly proud of the work that has been led by organizations like Growing Places to connect local farms and their produce to our local community -- and to get creative with lightly processing the produce to better ensure the local food is enjoyed by our residents.