

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:	Paul Ruseau
Party:	Democratic
District:	34th Middlesex
Position Sought:	State Representative
Website:	www.electpaul.org

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

Candidate Answer: I grew up experiencing homelessness and continuous food insecurity, and I have made free school meals a part of my School Committee campaigns - authoring the resolution in Medford that had Medford Public Schools pass free school meals before the State did so.

My other experiences are that the SNAP program did not reach my family even though it was available. I have an intense interest in the SNAP Gap and want to focus on the difference between the availability of services and their accessibility.

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: The role of the state government should be vastly greater than it is today. Housing, healthcare, transportation, and other seemingly unrelated issues are major drivers of food insecurity. The state must do much more to address these other issues, allowing families to spend what money they do have on food. The state also needs to spend real money to reach all our residents who are eligible for food assistance through existing programs.

The state should also invest in state-owned grocery stores - which can be located in food deserts in a way that for-profit grocery chains struggle to fill.

The state should develop a program to provide substantial financial assistance to ensure that no child is living in poverty. The pandemic federal assistance made a real difference - Massachusetts should fill this gap itself; the federal government is essentially offline for the next few years at least.

Location matters when addressing food insecurity - and we should not create a single format but rather ensure we are providing the services that match the reality on the ground in the many communities of our state.

A full rethink of what is a state responsibility and what is a federal responsibility may be necessary as our federal government retreats from the most basic responsibilities it has traditionally had.

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

Candidate Answer: A number of agencies are experiencing increased responsibilities and decreased resources to carry them out. We need to hire more folks at the DTA. Additionally, we should look to other departments within state government with better capacity and response rates to see whether there are any structural challenges that need resolution, but I honestly believe the issue is simply that we need to hire more folks to do this work!

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! My own childhood experiences are the primary reason I am running for office - and availability is not accessibility - and we need to KNOW that everyone eligible is aware of and has the supports they require to apply for all benefits they are entitled to. We need a LOT more staff for this level of support - but I am deeply committed to ensuring all these 'good programs' are in fact reaching the people that need them - because too many have been satisfied with saying 'we provide this!'

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 number one for many is awareness. For our immigrant neighbors, there is the fear of being brought into the Trump administration's immigration 'enforcement.' Of course, the cost of housing and food itself is a major factor, given that these are groups of people who often have fewer resources at their disposal - or less generational wealth to rely on. Addressing the housing crisis - ensuring we have sufficient Section 8 housing, building dramatically more mixed-income housing, and implementing rent control will go a long way to reducing the pressures of these communities. I think it is important not to treat all of these various communities as if the challenges are the same, and of course someone can be all of the categories listed above. Most of us will become disabled at some point in our lives - and our supports for our disabled and also our senior population need a lot of additional attention.*

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

Candidate Answer: *I will not leave this 'issue' alone until every person in Massachusetts is fed - it took me decades to 'get over' my hunger-related issues from my childhood, but of course, I'll never be over them. The impacts of hunger are long-lasting- and if we look at not just the inhumanity of our current systems, they also cost more than they need to - a well-fed student learns better; a well-fed employee is a better worker. But the humanity alone is more than enough for me to keep working on this solvable challenge until we can make hunger history in Massachusetts. Also, increasing the minimum wage to at least \$20/hour and pegging it to inflation is one of my top priorities. How I plan to pay for all of this is well thought out - but I won't get into those details unless you would like them! Thank you!!*

