

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:	Ronald Waddell
Party:	Democratic
District:	15th Worcester
Position Sought:	State Representative
Website:	waddellforworchester.com

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

Candidate Answer: My connection to hunger and food security is both personal and professional. I have experienced homelessness firsthand, so I know what it means to struggle to meet basic needs and to experience the uncertainty that comes with not having stable access to food, housing, transportation, and employment.

Those experiences have shaped the work I have dedicated my life to. Through Legendary Legacies, I work with individuals facing barriers related to poverty, incarceration, violence, employment, and successful reentry. One of the programs I am particularly proud of is Legacy Transport, our workforce development and social benefit program. In partnership with the Worcester County Food Bank, participants gain paid, real-world employment experience by transporting and distributing food to neighborhood food pantries. Today, Legacy Transport participants deliver approximately 150,000 pounds of food each month to seven local pantries.

The program addresses two challenges at the same time: food insecurity in our neighborhoods and the employment barriers faced by people returning from incarceration. Participants develop the reliability, teamwork, professionalism,

digital literacy, and workplace skills necessary to obtain and maintain long-term employment while doing work that directly serves their community.

I also served as Chair of the Coalition for a Healthy Greater Worcester, where I worked with community partners on the social and economic conditions that affect health. That experience reinforced what I have learned through my own life and through Legendary Legacies: hunger cannot be separated from housing, transportation, employment, health, and economic opportunity.

I bring lived experience, direct service, workforce development, and community leadership to this issue. I understand what it is like to need support, but I have also spent years building solutions that help others achieve stability. That is why I believe federal nutrition programs and investments in our local food system are essential—and why the voices of people who have experienced hunger and poverty must be part of shaping those policies.

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 has a responsibility to make sure people can meet their basic needs before they are forced to rely on emergency food assistance. Food banks and pantries do incredible work, but they were never meant to carry this much of the burden.

I know from my own life that hunger is rarely just about food. It is connected to housing, transportation, work, health, and whether someone has enough stability to make it through the week. When any one of those things falls apart, food insecurity can follow very quickly.

We also have to be smarter about the food we already have. Too much good food is still going to waste while families are struggling. I believe the state can help create a more efficient food recovery and distribution system so that farms, grocery stores, restaurants, institutions, food banks, and community organizations can move safe, usable food where it is needed instead of throwing it away.

I have seen the value of that kind of system through Legendary Legacies.

Through our Legacy Transport workforce program and our partnership with the Worcester County Food Bank, participants who face barriers to employment gain

paid work experience while helping deliver approximately 150,000 pounds of food each month to seven community food pantries.

That work has shown me that we do not have to look at hunger, workforce development, transportation, and economic opportunity as separate issues. We can build programs that address several of these challenges at the same time. I also served as Chair of the Coalition for a Healthy Greater Worcester, where I worked with community partners on the conditions that shape people's health and quality of life. That experience reinforced something I have believed for a long time: food access is connected to almost everything else in a person's life. The state should continue investing in programs like universal school meals, SNAP, the Healthy Incentives Program, and support for local food systems. At the same time, we should invest in transportation, storage, food recovery, and distribution so that we are using our resources more effectively. Our goal should not be to simply expand emergency food programs every year. Our goal should be to build a system where fewer families need emergency food in the first place, and where good food does not go to waste while people in our communities are hungry.

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

Candidate Answer: The Commonwealth is going to face increasing demand across nearly every social service, and we need to make sure our systems are prepared to meet that demand. When someone is struggling and reaches out for help, they should be able to reach a person who can actually help them. If people cannot reach a DTA caseworker, then access to SNAP exists on paper but not always in practice. No family should lose food assistance because they could not get through on the phone, had difficulty with paperwork, or could not get a question answered before a deadline.

The Commonwealth should improve staffing and technology at DTA, provide reliable ways to get assistance by phone, online, and in person, and work more closely with trusted community organizations that already help residents navigate these programs.

We also need to build the system around the realities of people's lives. Not everyone has reliable internet, transportation, flexible work hours, or hours to spend waiting on hold. The process should be simple, accessible, and respectful. SNAP is one of our strongest tools for preventing hunger, and it brings federal dollars directly into Massachusetts communities. If someone is eligible for those benefits, unnecessary barriers should not prevent them from receiving them. Our job is to make sure the help that exists actually reaches the people who need it.

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. As a member of the Massachusetts Legislature, I would advocate for state funding to hire the staff necessary to ensure every eligible low-income resident can successfully access federally funded nutrition benefits. If investing state dollars in adequate staffing allows Massachusetts residents to receive federal benefits they are already eligible for, that is an investment I support. We should not lose federal nutrition dollars or allow families to go without food simply because there are not enough caseworkers to process applications, answer questions, or maintain benefits. I would support funding the staffing levels necessary to make the system accessible, responsive, and accountable to the people it serves.

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 disparities we see in hunger are connected to disparities in housing, employment, wages, transportation, health care, education, and

access to opportunity. When people face barriers in several of these areas at the same time, food insecurity is often one of the results.

I have seen this throughout my life and my work. Having experienced homelessness myself and now working with people facing poverty, incarceration, unemployment, and other barriers, I know that hunger rarely exists by itself. A person may have a job but still not earn enough to cover rent and groceries. Someone may qualify for assistance but have difficulty navigating the system. Another family may have food available in their community but lack reliable transportation to get to it.

Government needs to address both the immediate need and these underlying conditions. That means protecting access to SNAP and other nutrition programs, increasing economic opportunity, addressing the cost of housing, improving transportation, supporting workforce development, and making government services easier to access.

We also need to listen to the communities experiencing these disparities. People closest to these challenges often understand the barriers and potential solutions better than anyone. Government should make sure their voices are represented when policies and programs are being developed.

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

Candidate Answer: My approach to food insecurity is shaped by my own lived experience with homelessness and by the work I have done in Worcester. I know firsthand that hunger rarely exists by itself. It is connected to housing, wages, transportation, employment, health, and whether people have a real opportunity to become stable and self-sufficient.

Through Legendary Legacies, I have seen how we can address several of these challenges at the same time. Our Legacy Transport workforce program, in partnership with the Worcester County Food Bank, provides paid work experience to people facing barriers to employment while helping deliver approximately 150,000 pounds of food each month to seven community food pantries. That is the kind of practical approach I want to bring to state government: address the immediate need while also creating pathways to employment and long-term stability.

I also believe food security should also be about having access to affordable, nutritious food that supports the health of our families. Too often, the least expensive and most accessible options are highly processed foods. Families should not have to choose between what they can afford and what is good for their health.

I would support Massachusetts taking a serious look at the ingredients and additives allowed in our food supply, including reviewing concerns with the federal Generally Recognized as Safe, or GRAS, process. Where credible scientific evidence demonstrates that a particular additive presents an unnecessary health risk, I believe Massachusetts should explore whether stronger state standards or restrictions are appropriate.

We also need to reduce food waste and build a more efficient system for recovering and distributing good food that would otherwise be thrown away. At the same time, we must protect programs like SNAP, universal school meals, and the Healthy Incentives Program and address the underlying costs that are pushing working families into food insecurity.

My goal is not simply to make our emergency food system bigger. It is to reduce the number of people who need it. That means making sure people have enough to eat today while addressing the economic and systemic conditions that caused them to need assistance in the first place.