



Get to Know the Candidates

Vote Against Hunger

November 30, 2022

Our mission is to connect people and communities in Massachusetts to reliable sources of food while advocating for policies that make food more accessible—so that no one goes hungry. As such, Project Bread asked all candidates who were not unopposed incumbents to answer a few questions about their views on anti-hunger initiatives.

Name: Shirley Arriaga

Party: Democratic

District: 8th Hampden

Position Sought: State Representative

Website: shirley4chicopee.com

What is your experience with the federal nutrition assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), school, summer, and after school, meals, or the Women, Infant, and Child (WIC) program?

Programs such SNAP and WIC are essential programs that are needed in our state. Unfortunately, cost of living continues to skyrocket and makes it difficult for families to survive, resulting in nutritional food sacrifices. As we all have seen, healthier foods are associated with higher cost. When families including my own look to organic foods, the first thing that is noticed is the higher cost. It is unfortunate that we live in a society that pushes for less nutritional foods and makes it extremely difficult for families to eat in a healthier manner. Additionally, as an educator, I have witnessed see the benefits of providing free breakfast and lunch to the students. A Lot of families are struggling to provide food for their children. I am grateful that programs such as WIC and SNAP are available in order to provide some relief. WIC does an amazing job in helping keep mothers and infants healthy!





What are your plans for working in partnership with those with recent or current lived experience of food insecurity to inform and implement solutions?

My campaign is all about connecting with my community. I have knocked on over 21,000 doors across the district in the past year. My agenda and solutions are directly impacted by what I've heard from constituents. Getting them what they need, and how they need it, is of utmost importance. In order to ensure folks in the district know what resources are available, and how to access them, I have begun to learn about all of the food service resources in our district. This is a key first step to addressing the matter. Having a strong collaboration with our community partners will allow us to aid a lot of families.

How would you further ensure that more eligible residents receive SNAP benefits both in district and across the Commonwealth?

I believe education is key as I noted and sharing information where people are coming together or buying their food, but also streamlining how services are provided such as closing the SNAP gap. Western Massachusetts is uniquely situated to provide farm fresh food to residents of Gateway Cities like Chicopee. Investing financially and energy credits for farms will expand their ability to provide these foods, especially considering the impact of climate change on food sources and growth. Farmers' markets allow for food benefit use, but ensuring those market times and locations are easy to attend is paramount.

Would you support using additional state resources to supplement SNAP to either expand eligibility, increase benefits amount, or both?

I support expanding eligibility and increasing benefit amounts.

How would you help promote Summer Eats (the Summer Food Service Program) program in your district and across the state?

We need to look at ways to ensure kids eat free all year round despite finances at home. A Lot of kids go hungry and there should be no child left out due to finances in the home. Many families are barely getting by, and our children





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should not bear the weight of those problems. Programs such as Summer Eats are necessary to address this disparity. Utilizing social media, mobile delivery and local grab and eat hot spots will aid in informing families of the various ways to obtain lunch during the summer break.

Would you commit to supporting state legislation that ensures free school meals for all students?

Yes.

What steps would you take in reducing stigma and increasing accessibility for households of all backgrounds in access federal nutrition programs and other food resources?

Expanding to a digital payment option from a phone would both reduce stigma and streamline the payment process. Many working families / those on a fixed income are unaware that they are eligible. This highlights an increased need for program eligibility and streamlining how people receive these benefits is paramount. The financial guidelines are also in need of serious revisions, since the cost of living has gone up significantly so should the income guidelines for working households.

How do you plan to use your platform to dismantle systemic racism and xenophobia, particularly in ways that advance equity in accessing basic needs, employment opportunities, and increase generational wealth?

I will use a racial justice lens in every decision I make as an elected official, and believe all oppression is connected. BIPOC communities are the hardest impacted by a lack of government investments. My goal is to create a more equitable district and Commonwealth by calling out policies that fail to account for racial justice, such as inequitable healthcare, food, and educational opportunities. Programs and policies can encourage and support individuals to save additional money for things such as housing or emergencies without losing their benefits, an empowering and sustaining practice for all.





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I will be transparent in my goals and fight to ensure everyone has equal access to housing, health care, education, transportation, jobs, and every other aspect of society. Our government is supposed to work for everyone, but too often, it leaves people behind because of policies that do not consider racial justice. I will do everything in my power to change that.

Can you please share your plans to address other challenges food insecure household may be facing?

Housing and transportation costs are big issues in Chicopee which directly impact food access. Additionally, the cost of utilities such as heat and water along with the increases in food costs due to inflation, policy, and ongoing pandemic concerns has been a huge burden on working families and those on a fixed income. Because they can't control utility costs directly, people often look to cut where they can such as their food or even medication budget which can have very negative consequences. I will work with unions and advocacy organizations to push for higher wages. As we can all agree the problem is wages have not kept up with the cost of living and needs to be addressed ASAP!

How would you ensure new economic opportunities or programs to help your constituents access basic needs, such as housing or food, are equitably delivered to those most in need?

Having worked in constituent services, knowing about a program is the first step. Massachusetts has so many great programs already that can support first time homebuyers in Gateway communities like Chicopee. Expanding zoning for multi family housing as intergenerational living increases in the community to preserve and promote wealth is needed.

Chicopee is fortunate to have access to many incredible community, state, and private universities as well. Increasing our partnerships with these entities can greatly benefit new or returning students of all backgrounds, and encourages building their lives in our great community. Establishing working relationships with organizations that offer these resources is a must in order to advocate for the needed resources for all.





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

[No response provided by candidate]

