



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: James Arena-DeRosa

Party: Democratic

District: 8th Middlesex

Position Sought: State Representative

Website: jamesforstaterrep.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?

I was fortunate to have served as the Northeast Regional Administrator for USDA during the Obama Administration. In that role I had oversight of 12 billion dollars in federal food assistance and worked closely with communities and local and state governments non-profits that administrated SNAP, school lunch, school breakfast, after school and WIC. (as well as other emergency food programs). Although private entities are often generous, it is the federal nutrition programs that are teh backbone of the food security safety net - providing 95% of the resources to address issues related to hunger and food security.

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

Food insecurity is one of those foundational issues that has such a brood impact on peoples lives. My work on hunger linked me to educators, health providers, local agencies, food producers .. but it has always been part of my orientation (farmworkers/Oxfam/Peace Corps) to directly involve and engage/work in





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partnership with communities in any policy work that impacts them (and not just hunger). Given my background hunger will always be top of mind. When I was asked what is the one thing I would like to accomplish I say it is to help amplify the voices of those often left out of policy discussion. Specifically when I was asked if I could emulate something done by another state what would it be and I said universal school meals as implemented by Maine.

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

I have supported the common app for years - other states do a much better job of this. We put people through so many hoops often the same questions. Happy to help educate residents on eligibility (out here I worry about elderly who don't take SNAP because they "worry about taking food from others more needy" but as we know the program doesn't work that way.

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

YES (and someday we'll look at cost of living differentials - MA residents get hurt by not doing this).

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

This has been an ongoing challenge but I think we need to look at more flexibility in the program. The were written when a large majority of kids were part of ongoing summer programs. Beyond that I am certainly willing to help w kickoffs and hope to partner with my good friend and our Congressman Jim McGovern who has always been a champion of these issues. Sadly too many kids lose critical learning capacity because they are undernourished in the summer.





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

YES - I was glad the legislature got the extension but I absolutely support making this a permanent program. (per my earlier answer!)

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?

I think this is endemic to society - but in general we need to make these programs easier to access. I do think the universal school meals - where kids are literally in line and treated differently - would make a big difference here where everyone gets treated the same.

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 have spent my career working with people from around the world, from different races, ethnic, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds - listening and helping them meet their basic needs. It starts with basic respect, listening to all, and ALWAYS doing whatever I can so those voices are part of policy discussions (partly because I think it is more just -- but also because it is an approach that will get us better long term solutions as a society).

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

As we know food insecure households face many challenges. We face a housing crisis in Massachusetts and escalating health care costs and rampant inflation has cut into recent gains in wage equity. This gets into larger issues about the structure of the economy and I am hoping that the Healey-Driscoll team will bring new energy to these challenges and I will be supportive.





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?

Constant communication and being accessible to teh constituents of the district. There are some good programs out there that too many people don't kwon about. I intend to serve full time so I can immerse myself in the needs of teh community and carry those issues to a Beacon Hill context.

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

Thank you so much for asking these important questions. As a long time admirer and collaborator in the past with Project Bread (at Oxfam and USDA Food and Nutrition) it would be an honor to work with you and other communities on these important issues.

James Arena-DeRosa Democratic nominee for MA State Representative 8th Middlesex

