



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
House of Representatives  
State House, Boston 02133-1054

May 7, 2025

Senator Patricia D. Jehlen, Chair  
Representative Thomas M. Stanley, Chair  
Joint Committee on Elder Affairs  
State House  
34 Beacon Street  
Boston, MA 02113

Dear Honorable Chair Jehlen and Chair Stanley,

Thank you for your leadership of the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs. I am writing in support of *H4039, An Act relative to universal breakfast and lunch at senior centers.*

Massachusetts already recognizes the value of ensuring free breakfast and lunch for students to help combat childhood hunger and support academic success. A similar program for senior citizens would significantly reduce food insecurity and promote better health outcomes for older adults.

Senior citizens are disproportionately affected by food insecurity and isolation. This is a silent crisis, robbing our elders of dignity, health, and the basic security they deserve after a lifetime of contribution.

In 2023, approximately 1 in 5 seniors in Massachusetts reported experiencing food insecurity, according to The Greater Boston Food Bank's 2024 statewide study. This equates to about 380,000 older adults facing challenges in accessing sufficient and nutritious food. A 2024 AARP report further breaks down these rates by age group: 8.8% among adults aged 50–59, 10% among those aged 60–69, and 3.5% among individuals aged 70 and older. These figures indicate that older adults are disproportionately affected by food insecurity, with younger seniors facing higher rates. These statistics underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to address food insecurity among Massachusetts' senior population.

Community meals offer seniors more than just a healthy meal—they foster social engagement and strengthen emotional and physical well-being. Social isolation in senior adults can lead to serious negative effects, including increased risks of depression, cognitive decline, and chronic health conditions. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that social isolation significantly increases a person's risk of premature death from all causes—a risk comparable to smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity. Additionally, social isolation is associated with about a 50% increased risk of dementia, as well as higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide among older adults.

In an effort to mitigate this crisis, I filed H4039, which seeks to establish a universal breakfast and lunch program at community-based senior centers, centers for active living, and councils on aging with kitchen facilities across Massachusetts. Community meals provide senior citizens with not only nutritious food but also vital social connection, helping to combat isolation and support overall well-being.

This proposed legislation will be funded by a newly created **Senior Breakfast and Lunch Fund**, managed by the **Department of Aging and Independence**. The fund will draw from various sources including state appropriations, private contributions, federal grants, and at least 1% of the sales tax revenue collected from clothing and footwear items priced over \$175.

The legislation outlines that the fund will support:

- Implementation of the meal programs,
- Kitchen upgrades at participating centers,
- Collaboration with existing meal programs, and
- Other resources needed to ensure effective food service delivery.

An annual report on the program's activities and finances will be submitted to relevant legislative committees and clerks by December 31 each year.

I appreciate this opportunity to share my strong endorsement for *H4039, An Act relative to universal breakfast and lunch at senior centers*. This legislation is vital to combat the alarming rise of food insecurity and isolation among this population, ensuring every senior has reliable access to nutritious meals and social contact in their community. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



**Michelle L. Badger**  
*State Representative*  
1<sup>st</sup> Plymouth District

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, July 30). Non-medical factors that affect Alzheimer's disease and related dementias risk. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. [https://www.cdc.gov/alzheimers-dementia/php/sdoh/?CDC\\_AAref\\_Val=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Faging%2Fdisparities%2Fsocial-determinants-alzheimers.html](https://www.cdc.gov/alzheimers-dementia/php/sdoh/?CDC_AAref_Val=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Faging%2Fdisparities%2Fsocial-determinants-alzheimers.html)

Fuccione, J. (2024, January 17). AARP report: Food insecurity among older adults on the rise. Massachusetts Healthy Aging Collaborative. <https://mahealthyagingcollaborative.org/aarp-report-food-insecurity-among-older-adults-on-the-rise/>

Nearly 2 million adults in Massachusetts are food insecure including 45% of adults in four counties, according to the Greater Boston Food Bank's fourth annual statewide study. The Greater Boston Food Bank. (n.d.). <https://www.gbfb.org/news/press-releases/nearly-2-million-adults-massachusetts-food-insecure-including-45-adults-four-counties-according-greater-boston-food-banks-fourth-annual-statewide-study/>