

‘Desperate’: Healey anti-hunger task force member hasn’t eaten for days to raise awareness for food-stamp funding needs

By [Yogev Toby](#) Globe Correspondent, Updated August 8, 2026, 7:30 a.m.



Liz O’Gilvie leads two organizations that battle food insecurity in Western Massachusetts. As of Friday, she said she hadn’t eaten for five days. Suzanne Kreiter/Globe Staff

During the last year, a growing number of [Liz O’Gilvie’s neighbors in Springfield](#) have come to her small community garden store in search of food assistance.

O’Gilvie, a member of Governor Maura Healey’s Anti-Hunger Task Force, has grown increasingly frustrated with what she sees as a serious underfunding of the state office that oversees the food-stamp program, causing harm to vulnerable communities. Now, the 63-year-old has joined the hungry in solidarity — and, as of Friday, was on day five of not eating.

“I want the governor to know how desperate we all are,” she said. “What I needed to do was stand in hunger with my neighbors.”

O’Gilvie has vowed not to eat until her concerns are addressed. Specifically, she wants the Healey administration to [increase funding and staffing](#) at the state agency that oversees the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. She says the office can’t accommodate its growing burdens under federal changes, leading more people to go hungry without enough support.

Thousands of people in Massachusetts [have lost access to food benefits](#) this year, including 64,000 children, according to state data. Advocates say that’s because of federal changes to SNAP and understaffing in the state’s Department of Transitional Assistance.

[Healey appointed O’Gilvie](#), who leads the Springfield Food Policy Council, to the state’s Anti-Hunger Task Force last year. The task force convenes more than 30 leaders in the state’s food justice system, food bank executives, and

state Cabinet secretaries, to tackle the effect of federal cuts to the food system and produce recommendations to the state Legislature.

After months of advocacy by task force members, O’Gilvie said, the Healey administration and the Legislature did not adhere to the task force’s main recommendations to increase the department’s funding and staffing in the new state budget. The effects on the ground, she said, are devastating.

O’Gilvie now lives off of water and a packet of electrolytes to give her enough glucose her body needs due to multiple medical conditions.

A spokesperson for the Department of Transitional Assistance said the agency is doing everything it can to help people stay on SNAP, including expanding outreach, hiring caseworkers, strengthening partnerships with community organizations, and investing in technology to make it easier for eligible resident to access and keep their benefits.

“No one in Massachusetts should go hungry,” the statement said. “We will continue doing everything we can to make sure families, seniors, veterans and people with disabilities have access to the food assistance they need.”

A spokesperson for Healey pointed to the DTA’s comment on the matter.

[The department has struggled to address the massive volume of additional caseloads](#), mostly because of new intensive eligibility assessments and work mandates in the so-called One Big Beautiful Bill, the Globe has previously reported. Caseworkers now need to spend more time on each case to ensure each recipient is receiving the correct amount.

The task force said the state needed to hire an additional 200 caseworkers to deal with the increased workload.

The state budget, however, allocated additional funds to hire 76 caseworkers. That was in addition to another 42 that were hired in recent months.

When people call the office to register for benefits, they often don’t get through. Since January, nearly 80 percent of calls to DTA were disconnected, according to an analysis from the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute. Over a 12-month period, 119,000 households lost SNAP eligibility in Massachusetts, and about 64,000 children, according to DTA data.

Anti-hunger advocates believe the reason for the losses of SNAP have a lot to do with the new federal scrutiny of applicants and the mounting caseloads at the DTA, said Pat Baker, a task force member and a senior policy advocate at the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute.

Healey proposed \$147.7 million in the fiscal 2027 budget for DTA staffing, but the Legislature approved a final amount of \$122 million. The task force is asking for at least \$10 million more to stabilize the agency.

“There is no excuse for failing to do everything we can in this state to protect children,” Baker said. “I really think the governor has an opportunity to be a hero.”

Last month, 200 health care workers, 14 chambers of commerce, 57 city and town officials, and 19 mayors sent letters to Healey urging emergency funding for the state agency.

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“It shouldn’t have taken me to stop eating for her to take action,” O’Gilvie said. “It should have been enough to know there are many people who are not eating.” Suzanne Kreiter/Globe Staff

O’Gilvie leads two organizations that battle food insecurity in Western Massachusetts. In recent months, she has helped dozens of community members try to navigate the archaic state system, many of whom are seniors who are not tech savvy.

She said what drove her to stop eating was a visit from a mother in her community, who entered O’Gilvie’s house asking for food.

“She never lifted her head; she was filled with shame,” O’Gilvie said. “If you heard stories like this every day, you would do the same. You would understand the ripple of harm.”

Following a Globe inquiry Friday morning, Healey called O’Gilvie. O’Gilvie said she declined the call.

“It shouldn’t have taken me to stop eating for her to take action,” O’Gilvie said. “It should have been enough to know there are many people who are not eating.”

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