

ON HOMELESSNESS, FOOD STAMPS, WELFARE RULES

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The Globe put four questions to the candidates:

How would they confront record-level homelessness? With only half those eligible applying for food stamps, what would they do to increase access? Would they support using the **self-sufficiency standard**, in lieu of the federal poverty line, as a benchmark for government support? And, given the likelihood that a new federal law will require many more welfare recipients to work, how would they do it?

Democrat Shannon O'Brien said her plan to end homelessness is to build more affordable housing; reinstate a program, which the Legislature cut this year, to help the poor pay rent; and increase support for a nonprofit housing agency that leases apartments to families who have proven stable tenancy.

O'Brien added that she supports the **self-sufficiency standard** "as a more equitable measure of wealth" and would streamline the process of accessing food stamps by increasing office hours at the state's welfare agency, simplifying the application process, and translating educational information. "Because of the budget crisis, we may not be able to do all these immediately, but improving the

state's usage of the food stamp program should be a priority," she said. Republican Mitt Romney described ending homelessness as "one of the major goals of our administration" and said a key strategy would be to reduce domestic violence, one of many causes of homelessness.

Romney said he supports increasing access to food stamps and building on welfare reform, though he offered no specifics for either. However, he said he wouldn't support the **self-sufficiency standard**. "Anyone who tells you they would approve this type of huge new spending program, when state government is facing a \$1.5 billion deficit, isn't being honest with the people of our state," he said.

To confront homelessness, Jill Stein, the Green Party candidate, said she would end tax breaks for insiders and support programs helping the poor to pay their rent. She also supports the **self-sufficiency standard** and says she would fight any effort to put welfare recipients into low-paying jobs that "prevent them from adequately caring for their children."

While she supports increasing access to food stamps, she said her goal would be to "provide people with living-wage jobs

so that they won't need food stamps."

Independent Barbara Johnson said she has no plan to increase access to food stamps or put more welfare recipients to work, a goal she said relies on "all the wrong underlying assumptions."

She would, however, support the **self-sufficiency standard** and contends the state has more than enough money to house the homeless. "You have \$23 billion, and there's so much waste," she said.

Carla Howell, the Libertarian candidate, said the answer to fighting poverty in Massachusetts is ending the income tax. Homelessness and the reliance on food stamps and welfare would end, she said, with lower taxes and increased contributions to private charities.

"Big government poverty programs keep people trapped in poverty and keep them dependent," she said. "Big government drives up the cost of housing and the cost of living in Massachusetts and attempts to put Band-Aids on it with more micromanagement."