



**PROGRESSIVE MASSACHUSETTS
2020 LEGISLATIVE
ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Date: 5/13/2020

Candidate: Gretchen Van Ness

Office Sought: State Representative, 14th Suffolk

Party: Democratic

Website: www.gretchenvanness.org/

Twitter: @vannessforMA

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/vannessforMA/>

Instagram: @vannessforMA

OVERVIEW

We view our questionnaire as an educational resource, for both candidates and voters, on progressive approaches to the issues. It provides candidates the opportunity to address a number of important issues beyond the surface talking points, which progressive voters find extremely valuable when making a decision.

Our Questionnaires starts with an "About You" section and ends with an opportunity for you to include additional remarks beyond what we asked.

The bulk of our questionnaire is focused on the issues outlined in our [Progressive Platform](#), which also inform our [Legislative Agenda](#). We are interested in your overall philosophy as well as your views on specific policy and legislation.

Each section features charts or graphs (with links to sources) that illustrate one or more facets of the issue under discussion.

We encourage you to expand your answers beyond "yes/no" in the additional comments space provided on the form, but please keep answers < 150 words.

Issue Subsections:

- A. Revenue and Taxation
- B. Jobs and the Economy
- C. Education
- D. Health Care
- E. Housing
- F. Racial and Social Justice
- G. Good Government and Strong Democracy
- H. Sustainable Infrastructure and Environmental Protection

*Our questionnaire is comprehensive and will take time to complete. Please develop your answers in a separate document before inputting them into the submission form.
(progressivemass.com/questionnaire)*

I. About You

1. Why are you running for office? And what would be your top 3 legislative priorities if elected?

GVN: I am in this race because now more than ever, the 14th Suffolk District needs and deserves informed, engaged, and innovative leadership and advocacy. This pandemic is hitting underserved and under-resourced communities and communities of color, such as this majority-minority district, particularly hard. We must ensure that our communities survive until the rebuilding begins, and we must ensure that the rebuilding is fair and equitable and does not simply reinstate the failed policies and institutions of the past. For our recovery to be equitable and include everyone, progressive leaders on Boston City Council and in Congress need partners and advocates at the State House. In addition to leading, I will be an effective partner and advocate with my colleagues.

My legislative priorities include: an Essential Worker/Green New Deal/New WPA program that speeds the transition to a green and sustainable economy while ensuring fair wages, education and training, and health care for all; a reimagining and recommitment to public schools as community centers serving the whole child and child's family; and single-payer health care for all.

2. What prepares you to serve in this capacity?

GVN: My deep experience on the cutting edge of civil rights law, litigating and advocating against all forms of discrimination and for seemingly impossible advances such as marriage equality; my life-long social justice advocacy and organizing; my years of service and extensive experience in leadership positions in social justice organizations and on non-profit boards, including the Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts, the Board of Trustees of my college, LGBTQ Senior Housing, Inc., and Hyde Jackson Square Main Street; my experience as a small business owner meeting payroll; my experience as both a renter and homeowner in Boston; my work as General Counsel and Legislative Director for progressive Democratic State Senator Becca Rausch, which gave me the opportunity to assist in drafting and advancing progressive legislation, reviewing and drafting amendments to the state budget, and building strong relationships with progressive electeds and their staff; and my deep love of this district and the people who live and work here.

3. What do you view as the biggest obstacles to passing progressive policy at the state level?

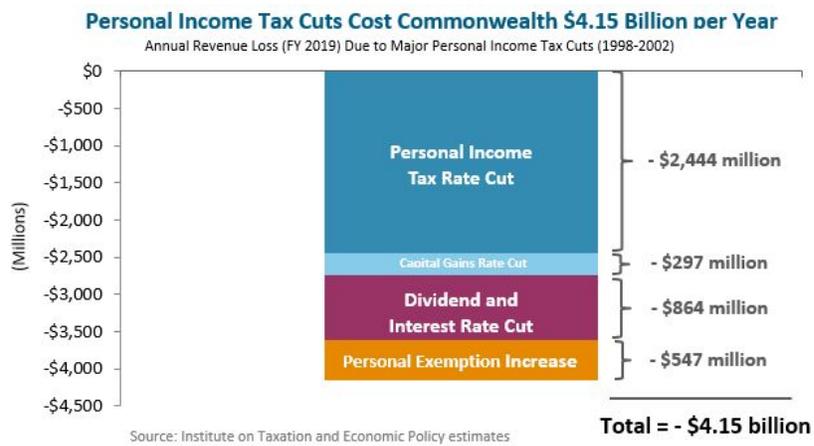
GVN: The lack of a sense of urgency about the problems we face among too many electeds and leaders; not having enough members of the progressive caucus to be consistently effective and to change the culture in the House; the joint standing committee structure, which too often allows the House to have a stranglehold over committee work; the inability to imagine a different way of serving the people of the Commonwealth that includes best practices in transparency and accountability; and the lack of a permanent law review commission that would serve as a repository of expertise and continual advice and recommendations to the legislature on statutory reform and modernization, to name just a few!

II. The Issues

A. Revenue and Taxation

Between 1977 and 2016, Massachusetts [reduced state taxes](#) by more than all but two other states. Because of income tax cuts enacted between 1998 and 2002, Massachusetts loses over \$4 billion in tax revenue *each year*--\$4 billion that is not invested in our roads, bridges, schools, parks, and services, all of which have historically been part of why MA is a great place to live. Such cuts to the state income tax have meant increasing reliance on fees, as well as sales, gas, and property taxes, exacerbating the overall regressivity of the system. Regressive taxation strains low- and middle-income families, and reduced revenue collection curtails our ability to invest in vital infrastructure. It also restricts legislators' ability--and willingness--to pass new and visionary legislation, as there is a continual shortage of funds for existing priorities.

Declining revenues have meant drastic cuts, limiting our ability to invest in our communities and future economic stability.



Massachusetts state and local taxes are regressive.



1. **Please explain your principles and proposals as relate to this issue, and what work you personally have done to advance them (legislation, community work, published writings, etc.).**

GVN: I support the millionaire's tax and reforming our entire tax structure. Our Commonwealth has been starved for resources for too long. While working for Senator Rausch, I saw first hand the heartbreaking toll this lost revenue has taken on our state. As we tackle the hard work of rebuilding our economy in the months and years to come, we must be courageous and tackle tax reform so that everyone pays their fair share.

2. **Corporate Tax Breaks. Corporate tax breaks cost Massachusetts more than \$1 billion in foregone revenue each year. Companies can secure access to such tax breaks due to political connections whether or not the promised benefits ever materialize. Which of the following accountability steps would you support?**
 - a. Collecting and publicly disclosing information about the benefits to the state from any tax break?
 - b. Repealing any tax break that does not provide the intended benefits in a cost-effective manner?
 - c. Establishing sunset dates for all tax breaks so that they must come up for periodic review?

GVN: Corporate tax breaks are rarely worth the lost revenue. There must be conditions attached, clawbacks when the conditions are not met, and sunset provisions.

3. **Fair Share. Would you support a constitutional amendment to increase the income tax on income over \$1 million by 4% (Fair Share Amendment, sometimes referred to as the "Millionaire's Tax")?**

GVN: YES.

I support repealing entirely the income tax provision in our constitution. Taxes are a matter of public policy, not constitutional rights, and our legislature needs the flexibility to adjust tax policy to respond to current needs. A progressive income tax is long overdue in Massachusetts.

4. **Progressive Revenue.** Massachusetts will not see new revenue from the Fair Share Amendment until 2023, but we have unmet needs now (and will still even with the Fair Share Amendment). Which policies would you support to make a more progressive tax code?
 - a. Raising the corporate minimum tax for larger companies? (The corporate minimum tax is currently only \$456.)
 - b. Imposing a tax on the portion of corporations' US profits that are shifted to offshore tax havens?
 - c. Raising the corporate tax rate from 8% to 9.5% (where it stood in 2009)?
 - d. Raising the tax on long-term capital gains from 5% to 8.95%, in line with states like New York and Vermont?
 - e. Levying a modest tax on university endowments greater than \$1 billion?

GVN: We're called "Taxachusetts" but it's simply not true. Our corporate taxes and fees are lower than many states with thriving economies. There is ample room for increasing corporate taxes and fees to more closely align with states with similar economies.

B. Jobs and the Economy

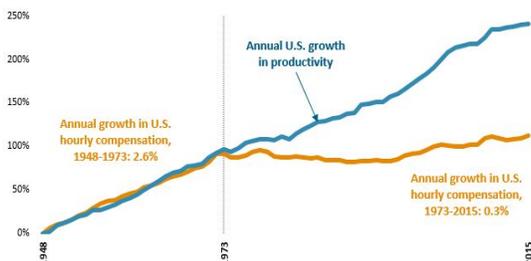
Massachusetts ranks as one of the top ten [most unequal states](#), as the gains from economic growth have disproportionately benefited the already well-off. Compounding this, we are one of the most expensive states in the country for [health care](#), [housing](#), and [child care](#), all of which strain wages. A strong economy depends on strong wages, as workers spend and help local economies thrive. Although the recently passed minimum wage increase will eventually lift the minimum wage to \$15 per hour, this is [still not a living wage](#) for many.

In recent decades, unions have been under attack. However, unions played -- and continue to play -- a pivotal role in creating a strong middle class. With weaker unions (or no unions at all) come weaker social and economic rights and an imbalanced economy.

Productivity has grown significantly since the 1970s, but it is not being reflected in higher wages.

A Large Gap Has Opened Between Wage and Productivity Growth Since 1973

Cumulative Change in U.S. Hourly Wages for Private-Sector Production/Non-Supervisory Workers and Net Productivity, 1948-2015



Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of unpublished Total Economy Productivity data from Bureau of Labor Statistics' Labor Productivity and Costs program, wage data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Employment Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics' Employment Cost Trends data, and the Bureau of Economic Analysis' National Income and Product Accounts
Note: Wages are the inflation-adjusted average hourly compensation of private-sector production/nonsupervisory workers.

Wages for most MA workers have remained stagnant since the Great Recession.

Wages For Most MA Workers Have Stagnated Since Great Recession

Real Value of Hourly Wage for Selected Wage-Earning Groups in MA and U.S., 1979-2016 (2016\$)



Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey data (deflated using CPI-U-RS).

1. **Please explain your principles and proposals as relate to this issue, and what work you personally have done to advance them (legislation, community work, published writings, etc.).**

GVN: I support Raise Up! Massachusetts and raising the minimum wage. Our economy has failed most working people and families. African American households have lost all of the gains of the past three decades. More and more families are falling out of the middle class. I support adding workers to corporate boards of directors and proposals to close the gap between the highest wage earners and the lowest wage earners in large corporations.

2. **Fair Wages. Do you support eliminating the subminimum wage for tipped workers in support of one fair wage?**

GVN: YES.

Most subminimum wage workers are women and people of color. Ending the exploitative wage is a moral imperative.

3. **Wage Theft. Do you support holding businesses responsible for the wage violations of their subcontractors when the work they do is substantially connected to the company's operations?**

GVN: YES.

Businesses should not be able to use subcontractors to avoid paying their workers a fair wage.

4. **Overtime. Would you support updating MA's state overtime law to restore overtime pay protections to low- and moderate-income salaried workers when they work more than 40 hours a week?**

GVN: YES.

Businesses should not be able to use our outdated overtime law to exploit their salaried employees.

5. **Fair Scheduling. Many workers in the service sector face irregular working hours, making it difficult to plan for other life events. Do you support providing workers the right to 14 days advance notice of hours and the right to request specific hours without retaliation from the employer?**

GVN: YES.

Shift workers should not have to be on call 24/7. They deserve a predictable schedule that allows them to attend school, take care of their families, go to medical appointments, and so on.

6. **Unions. Since the 2010 election, a number of states have rolled back the collective bargaining rights of public workers as part of a well-funded, nationwide assault on unions, led by wealthy, conservative donors. Would you oppose any effort to roll back the collective bargaining rights of state or municipal employees?**

GVN: YES.

I support the right of all workers to bargain collectively. While I worked at the State House, I signed a union card and supported the work to unionize legislative employees.

7. **Mandatory Arbitration.** Would you support legislation to prohibit the use of mandatory arbitration provisions in employment contracts, i.e., requirements that an employee forfeit the right to sue the employer for discrimination, nonpayment of wages, or other illegal conduct?

GVN: YES.

Mandatory arbitration privatizes the resolution of disputes with enormous public policy implications, depriving the legal system of precedents that advance the law and allowing employers to avoid public accountability for their actions. I co-authored a law review article about this problem when I was a young lawyer.

C. Education

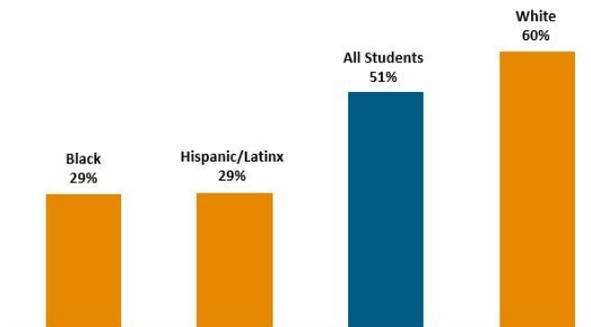
The promise of public education has always been as a gateway to opportunity and mobility for all, regardless of economic circumstances, a cornerstone of the American dream for all residents. Although our public education system gets high marks overall, it remains one of the [most unequal](#) in the country. Powerful corporate interests are promoting false solutions and working to undermine public schools, teachers, and unions. These groups invest millions of dollars to promote the expansion of privately run charter schools, which siphon money from our public K-12 districts while largely excluding students with the greatest needs. Costly, mandated standardized test results are used to label schools as “failing” and justify these privatization schemes.

Most of the [fastest-growing occupations](#) require education beyond a high school diploma, but Massachusetts has been disinvesting from public higher education for the past two decades. This has led to higher tuition costs, putting students at risk of long-term debt or making higher education out of reach for them entirely.

Massachusetts has significant achievement gaps reflective of resource gaps.

Massachusetts Has Significant Achievement Gaps for Youth of Color in 4th Grade Reading

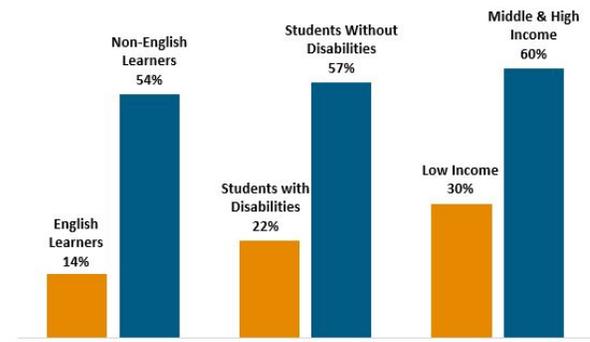
Share of MA 4th Graders Proficient on the 2017 NAEP Reading Exam, by Student Race, all students



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2017

Massachusetts Has Significant Achievement Gaps for Disadvantaged Youth in 4th Grade Reading

Share of Mass. 4th Graders Proficient on the 2017 NAEP Reading Exam, by Student Category

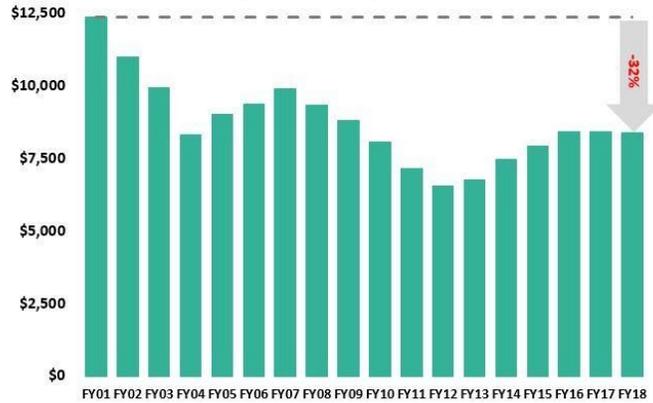


Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2017

Massachusetts has been disinvesting from higher education and shifting the cost burden onto students.

Per Student, MA Has Cut Higher Ed Funding by 32 Percent Since FY 2001

State spending on higher education per resident student, FY 2001-2018 (2018\$)



Note: FY 2007 total is adjusted downwards to account for the fact that significant funding during this year was for capital investments that supported activity during other fiscal years.

- 1. Please explain your principles and proposals as relate to this issue, and what work you personally have done to advance them (legislation, community work, published writings, etc.).**

GVN: I am a product of public schools and believe deeply in their mission and transformative power. Growing up, I attended both well-resourced and under-resourced public schools. Our current system punishes “failing” schools rather than showering them with the resources and support the need for their students to succeed. This is the exact opposite of good public policy. I support reimagining public schools as institutions at the heart of our communities that serve the whole child and that child’s family, with pre-school and after school programs, health, trauma, and well-being support, meals and laundry facilities, libraries, gardens, and playgrounds, and adult education and child care. Investing in public schools will be a critical part of our recovery.

- 2. Universal Pre-K. Do you support creating universal, free Pre-K, accessible to any resident of Massachusetts, integrated into the public school system?**

GVN: YES.

All of the studies show the high-quality universal pre-K helps both the child and the child’s family. We must make this investment in our children.

- 3. Equitable Funding. In 2019, Massachusetts updated its 25-year-old education funding formula and committed to \$1.5 billion more in investment in public schools. How will you make sure the state follows through with this promise?**

GVN: By rejecting the Governor's budget and working with allies in the House and Senate to ensure that the final state budget keeps this promise. I will also work with advocacy groups to keep the pressure on the State House to make this critical reform a reality.

- 4. Standardized Testing. Do you support a three-year moratorium on the high-stakes uses of standardized testing? (High-stakes" uses include high school graduation, teacher evaluation, and assigning ratings to schools.)**

GVN: YES.

High-stakes standardized testing has exacerbated racial and other inequities when we should be doing everything humanly possible to ameliorate those inequities. This moratorium will show that there are better ways to evaluate students, teachers, and schools.

5. **Charter Schools. In 2016, MA voters overwhelmingly rejected a ballot initiative to lift the cap on charter schools given the millions of dollars it would have siphoned away from public school districts.**
 - a. Do you support keeping the cap on charter schools? **YES.**
 - b. Would you support legislation to bring greater accountability to charter schools by requiring them to adhere to the same disclosure and disciplinary standards as public school districts? **YES.**

GVN: Our public schools need and deserve the resources that will enable them to help every child succeed. Educating our children is a public trust and all schools must be accountable.

6. **Sex Education. Do you support requiring public schools that teach sexual health education to provide age-appropriate, medically accurate information that is inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities and includes the effective use of contraception?**

GVN: YES.

All of the studies show that age-appropriate, medically accurate, inclusive sex education reduces rates of unplanned pregnancies and STIs. This is a tremendous achievement and should be implemented across the Commonwealth!

7. **Higher Education Access. Do you support granting in-state tuition and financial aid to undocumented students?**

GVN: YES.

Undocumented students are our neighbors and friends and members of every community. They deserve the same opportunities.

8. **Debt-Free College. Do you support making tuition (and mandatory curriculum fees) free at public colleges and universities?**

GVN: YES.

The reality for students attending public colleges and universities in the 1950s through the 1970s was that it was possible to work part-time at a minimum wage job and afford to go to college or graduate school full-time. Today, young people are crushed by student debt that is so significant it has a measurable impact on our economy. Other industrialized countries have moved to make public higher education free or virtually free and we must do the same, again.

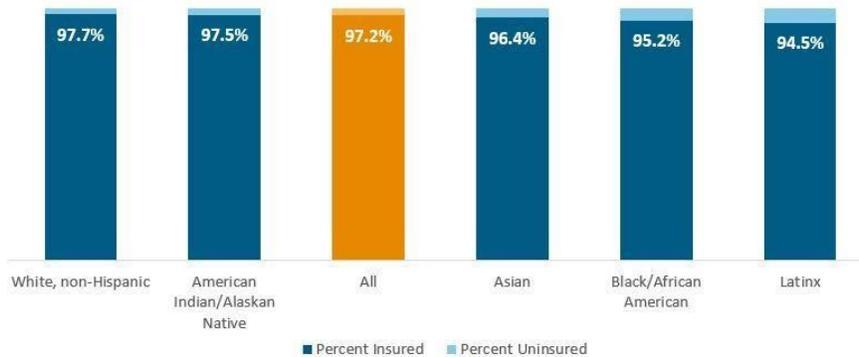
D. Health Care

Massachusetts has led the way in providing near universal health insurance coverage, with [97% of the state](#) having health insurance. But until that is 100%, we haven't reached truly universal coverage or tackled critical barriers to accessing care. Disparities in insurance coverage and health care access continue to exist along income, racial, and education lines. Premiums continue to rise, and high deductibles mean that many do not get the health care they need -- or suffer from long-lasting debt if they do. We still spend an oversized portion of public and private money on health care, but without necessarily achieving better health outcomes.

We have yet to achieve truly universal coverage, with continued disparities along racial lines.

Barriers to health insurance coverage remain for some

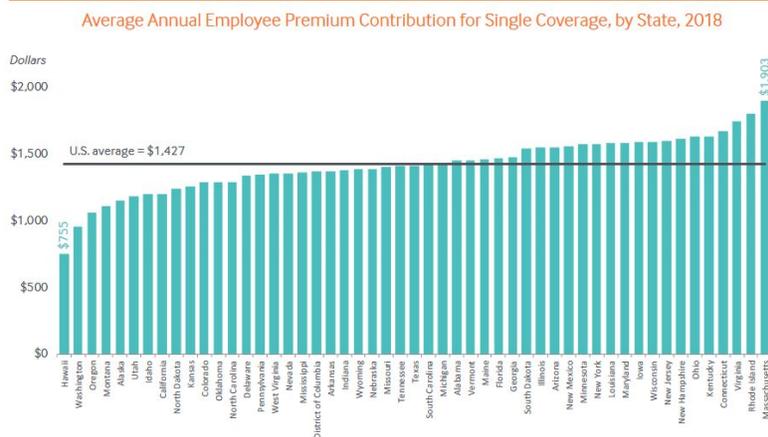
Percent with health insurance in Massachusetts, by race, 2017.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey.

*Note: Use particular caution when considering the American Indian/Alaskan Native data, because of small sample sizes. This chart does not include Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander because the sample was too small and therefore was not included in the Census Bureau's data.

MA has the highest health insurance premiums in the US.



Note: Employee premium contributions are for insurance policies offered by private-sector employers in the U.S.
Data: Medical Expenditure Panel Survey--Insurance Component (MEPS-IC), 2018.

1. **Please explain your principles and proposals as relate to this issue, and what work you personally have done to advance them (legislation, community work, published writings, etc.).**

GVN: If the need for universal single-payer health care was not critical before the pandemic, it certainly is now. Our current system has failed. We spend more per capita on health care than any other industrialized nation and have worse outcomes. The maternal mortality rate for women of color is among the highest in the world. Although most people have health insurance under the ACA, we have a two- or three-tiered health care system. My partner is a nurse who has worked at Boston Medical Center, Newton Wellesley Hospital, and the Dana Farber Cancer Institute and has seen these deep disparities and inequities in operation every day. As we rebuild after the pandemic, expanding single-payer health care for all must be a top priority. Health care, not health insurance, is a fundamental human right.

2. **Single Payer. Do you support enacting a single payer health care system in Massachusetts, which would guarantee health insurance as a right?**

GVN: YES.

This is an even more critical need as unemployment rates continue to rise.

3. **Reproductive Rights. In Massachusetts, women under eighteen seeking an abortion must obtain parental consent or judicial authorization. This can lead to young women going out of state, or risking their lives and health with illegal or self-induced abortion. Would you support repealing this restriction?**

GVN: YES.

Since the judicial bypass law was enacted, thousands of young women have appeared before judges to plead for the abortion health care they need. In all but a small handful of cases, judges granted their pleas. This law is completely unnecessary and unjust.

4. **Harm Reduction. An essential part of addressing the opioid crisis, safe consumption sites allow medical professionals to respond to overdoses and engage participants in medical and behavioral health services. Would you support the legalization of SCSs?**

GVN: YES.

Drug abuse is a medical, not criminal, issue. SCSs will save lives and move us closer to a medical model for addressing the problem and providing the care and support people who abuse drugs need.

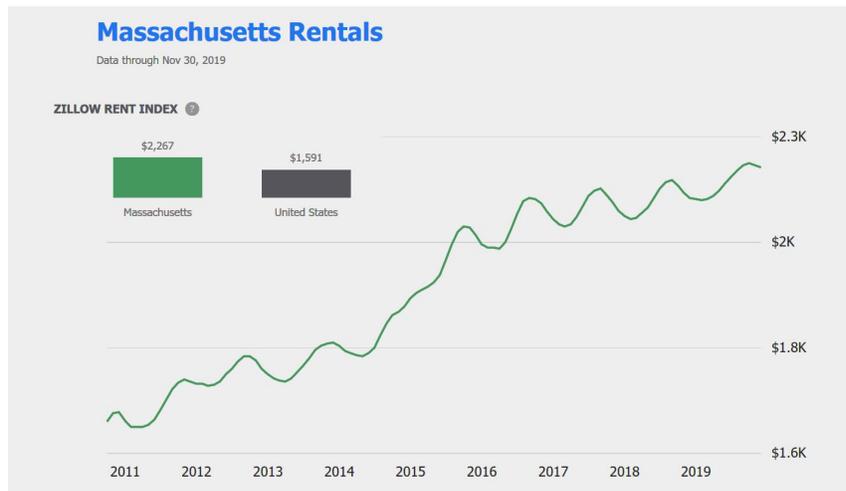
5. **Pandemic Response. How would you evaluate the state's response to the Covid-19 pandemic?**

GVN: Very poor. The Governor was late to respond, leading to our relatively small state having the third highest number of cases and deaths in the US. Decisive early action in California, a state with a significantly larger population, has led to thousands of fewer cases and deaths than in Massachusetts. The state still has not taken comprehensive action to ensure that all health care workers, nursing homes and prisons have the PPE they need, nor has it distributed masks to the general public. People are still unable to get unemployment benefits. Nonviolent offenders and folks awaiting trial who can't make bail are still imprisoned. Food pantries are struggling to meet increasing need. Now the Governor has begun reopening when we still don't have universal testing, effective treatment, or a vaccine. Moreover, while Seattle has set aside 20 miles of city streets for bikes and walking and the California Governor has signed an executive order mandating that a mail-in ballot be sent to every voter for the upcoming election, our Governor has created a Reopening Advisory Board dominated by business leaders that will most likely recommend ways to return to "normal" rather than proposing the reforms needed to help heal our communities, keep us safe, and move us all forward.

E. Housing

Massachusetts has a lot to offer, but that does little if people can't afford to live here. The [US News & World Report's annual state rankings](#) put Massachusetts at #41 in housing affordability (and #43 in cost of living). A worker earning minimum wage in Massachusetts would have to work [91 hours a week](#) to afford a modest one-bedroom rental home at market rate (and 113 hours for a modest two-bedroom). Over the last ten years, the need for affordable housing has increased, while funds for affordable housing have decreased at both federal and state levels. This is unsustainable. It has led to expanding economic inequality, increased homelessness, and damage to our economy, as talented workers often leave the state for less expensive regions.

Monthly median rents have gone up by more than one-third since 2010, outpacing income growth.



(source: [zillow.com](https://www.zillow.com))

1. **Please explain your principles and proposals as relate to this issue, and what work you personally have done to advance them (legislation, community work, published writings, etc.).**

GVN: Solving the housing crisis requires a sustained multi-faceted approach that includes increasing wages, limiting evictions and foreclosures, community-based planning to permit the density and mixed small retail and housing that used to exist in many neighborhoods, creative use of Community Preservation Act funds to convert vacant industrial buildings to housing that's affordable for working families, and taxes on luxury condominiums and homes to invest in housing that's affordable for working families. I fought against the repeal of rent control in the 1990s and have represented numerous tenants in landlord/tenant disputes as well as homeowners fighting foreclosure.

2. **Funding. Would you support legislation that would allow cities and towns to impose a fee on real estate transfers to generate revenue for affordable housing, with the ability to create local exemptions as appropriate?**

GVN: YES.

We need to encourage and support local innovation around affordable housing.

3. **Tenant Protections. Do you support passing enabling legislation to provide municipalities with the authority to implement rent-stabilizing regulations, just cause eviction protections, stronger condominium conversion and foreclosure**

protections, anti-displacement zones, and options to help tenants manage the upfront costs of leasing an apartment?

GVN: YES.

These measures are needed now more than ever!

4. **Zoning Reform/Housing Production. Do you support requiring cities and towns to allow multifamily housing to be built as of right within 1 mile of transit stations?**

GVN: YES.

We need both more multifamily housing and density as well as more transit stations.

5. **Eviction Sealing. Today, when a tenant exercises their legal rights in housing court, it creates a permanent record. Eviction records create lasting stigma, are error prone and impair access to stable housing. Would you support legislation to seal eviction records so that both tenant and landlord could move on with their lives after three years?**

GVN: YES.

I have read the bill and support it 100%.

F. Racial and Social Justice

Massachusetts must continue to strive to be a state that welcomes and embraces all of its residents and combats prejudice and discrimination of all kinds.

Mass incarceration in Massachusetts has proven socially and economically destructive, breaking apart communities across the state. From 2011 to 2016, [spending on prisons](#) grew faster than any other part of the Massachusetts budget, while funding for necessary services languished. The average cost per year to house an inmate in the Massachusetts Department of Corrections is [more than \\$60,000](#), money that could be better reinvested into the communities that have suffered from decades of misguided and racially discriminatory “tough on crime” policies. To achieve “justice for all,” we need a judicial system that does not disproportionately target communities of color and the poor and that does not criminalize public health issues such as addiction. The April 2018 criminal justice reform bill made strides forward, but there is more work to do.

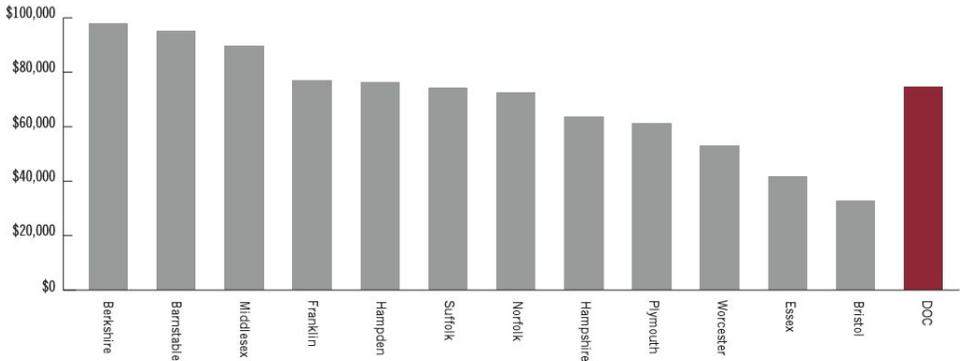
Immigrants make up 16% of Massachusetts’s population; however, demagoguery against, or indifference to, immigrant populations has historically been a mainstay of Massachusetts politics. As the Trump administration in Washington ramps up a xenophobic mass deportation agenda, it is important for states like Massachusetts to take leadership in protecting and advancing the rights of our immigrant communities and making clear that all are welcome.

Significant racial disparities exist in incarceration in Massachusetts.

Imprisonment by Race/Ethnicity (2014)	
White imprisonment rate (per 100,000)	81
Black imprisonment rate (per 100,000)	605
Hispanic imprisonment rate (per 100,000)	351
Racial/Ethnic Disparity in Imprisonment (2014)	
Black : white ratio	7.5
Hispanic : white ratio	4.3
Juveniles in Custody (2015)	
Juvenile custody rate (per 100,000)	66
White custody rate (per 100,000)	22
Black custody rate (per 100,000)	222
Latino custody rate (per 100,000)	172
American Indian custody rate (per 100,000)	0
Asian custody rate (per 100,000)	7

Massachusetts spends large (and growing) sums per inmate -- while still not providing for basic needs.

Figure 4: Estimated expenditure per inmate, FY 2019



Source: MassINC's analysis of Department of Correction Weekly Count Sheets, April 2018, and average House and SWM FY 2019 budget proposals (adjusted upward based on final expenditures, FY 2011 to FY 2018)

- 1. Please explain your principles and proposals as relate to this issue, and what work you personally have done to advance them (legislation, community work, published writings, etc.).**

GVN: Racial inequity infects every institution in our society and none more so than the criminal justice system. In my work as special law clerk to US District Court Judge David Mazzone when he served as chair of the US Sentencing Commission, I saw first hand that even mandatory sentencing guidelines failed to prevent racial disparities in sentencing. My work as a lawyer took me to courtrooms across the Commonwealth and it was painfully obvious who was prosecuted and who wasn't and how that correlated with skin color. I visited prisons with Judge Mazzone and more recently toured MCI-Framingham with a State House delegation. I support continuing criminal justice reform, decarceration, ending cash bail for nonviolent crimes, and alternatives to incarceration.

- 2. Police Accountability. Do you support the establishment of an independent review board for police shootings in the Commonwealth?**

GVN: YES.

One cannot investigate oneself. Independent review boards work in other states and must be instituted here.

- 3. Sentencing Reform. The 2018 criminal justice reform bill was an important first step in reducing mass incarceration. However, in our "liberal" state, incarceration rates remain much higher than they are in other countries, and sentencing laws can be even more punitive than those in states viewed as conservative. Which of the following reforms would you support?**

- Eliminating mandatory minimums for opioid-related offenses?
- Raising the age of criminal majority from 18 to 21, in line with research that shows that young offenders served by a juvenile system are much less likely to reoffend and more likely to successfully transition to adulthood?
- Decriminalizing consensual sexual activity between adolescents, by creating an exception to the statutory rape law for youth close in age?
- Eliminating the sentence of life without parole, which is costly and has been shown to be racist in its application?

GVN: These are all necessary, humane and just reforms.

- 4. Solitary Confinement. In Massachusetts, prisoners can be sentenced to 10 years of solitary confinement—per infraction. The UN defines holding someone in solitary confinement for more than 15 days as torture. Do you support limiting the use of solitary to no more than 15 consecutive days?**

GVN: YES.

This barbaric practice must end.

- 5. Prison Visitation. Maintaining connections with friends and family outside prisons is one of the most important factors in ensuring successful reentry. In March 2018, the DOC severely limited the ability of prisoners to receive visits and the rights of family and friends to visit their loved ones in prison. ([Read more on this here.](#)) Do you favor ending these restrictions?**

GVN: YES.

This inhumane policy must end immediately.

- 6. Prison Profiteering. While Massachusetts does not have private prisons, the DOC invites private companies to profit off of the families of prisoners by price gouging inmates who have no alternatives but to buy from the sole providers of goods in**

prisons. Do support ending the price gouging of inmates for necessary items and requiring DOC to adequately supply inmates with the basic requirements necessary for life to keep in contact with their families and maintain good health and hygiene?

GVN: YES.

I am so angry that we have allowed this corruption to flourish and will do everything in my power to end it and ensure that every incarcerated person's basic human needs are met.

7. **Safe Communities Act. Do you support the Safe Communities Act, which limits local and state police collaboration with federal immigration agents, bars law enforcement and court personnel from inquiring about immigration status, and ensures due process protections?**

GVN: YES.

Immigrants should not have to fear deportation if they need to call the police for assistance, not should our courthouses be hunting grounds for ICE.

8. **Work and Family Mobility Act. Do you support removing immigration status as a barrier to applying for a license or learner's permit?**

GVN: YES.

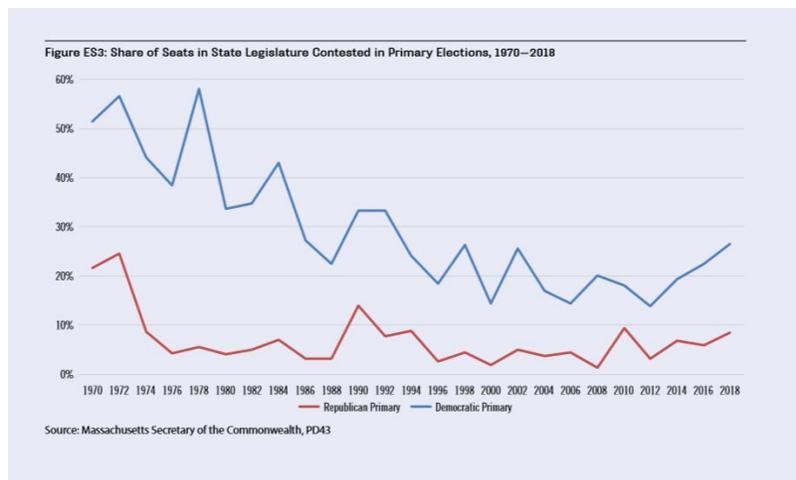
All of the studies show that granting learner's permits and driver's licenses regardless of immigration status makes the roads safer and reduces auto insurance costs for everyone.

G. Good Government and Strong Democracy

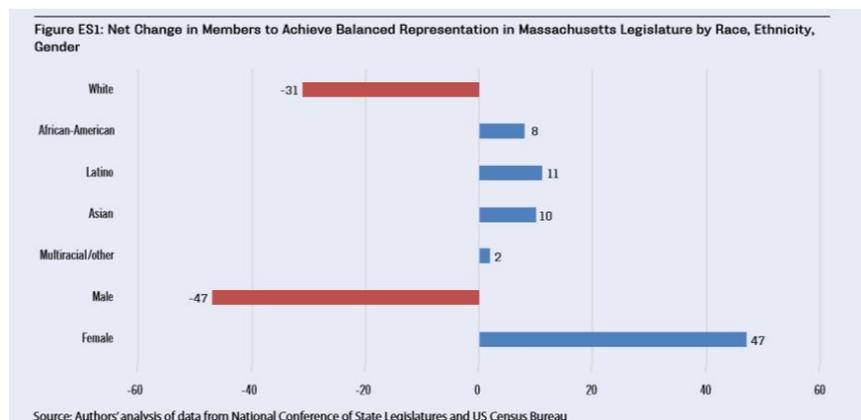
A strong democracy depends on a transparent and representative government and an engaged public. Too often, however, we see centralized, unaccountable power and barriers to participation. An undemocratic, centralized power structure on Beacon Hill makes it easier for lobbyists to target the top and undermine the system. Despite recent reforms, a weak public records system stymies government accountability: MA is one of only two states where all three branches of state government claim to be exempt. A strong democracy requires an engaged electorate, but voter turnout in midterm elections, and especially local elections, remains low. Although election modernization legislation in 2014 and 2018 helped bring much-needed reforms, we still lag behind states in New England and around the country in making voting accessible (Maine, for instance, has allowed for Election Day Registration since the 1970s).

A centralized power system, a skewed campaign finance system, and restrictive voting laws together help create a situation in which our elections are the [least competitive in the country](#).

Our elections have grown less competitive over the past four decades.



Our legislature is not reflective of the population as a whole.



- 1. Please explain your principles and proposals as relate to this issue, and what work you personally have done to advance them (legislation, community work, published writings, etc.).**

GVN: I'm a firm believer in primary challenges. I have long argued that we need to ditch Columbus Day and make Election Day a national holiday (named after Shirley Chisholm, which would also give us our first national holiday honoring a woman), but this doesn't solve the problem. Democracy is hard work and only succeeds when people are engaged and involved. We must remove the barriers to participation, including instituting automatic voter registration when a person turns 18, election day registration, early voting and voting by mail (also known as non-fault absentee voting), ranked choice voting, and public financing of campaigns.

- 2. Public Records Law. Massachusetts is one of only two states where the Governor's Office, the Legislature, and the Judiciary claim full exemption from the public records laws. Would you support eliminating this exemption?**

GVN: YES.

I worked on public records law legislation with Senator Rausch. It is long past time to update and modernize the entire statute.

- 3. Legislative Transparency -- Part I. The Massachusetts Legislature lacks many basic transparency measures found in other state legislatures around the country. Would you vote in favor of making the following items available online...?**
 - All committee votes, whether taken by electronic poll or formal roll call?
 - All written testimony submitted for or against bills?
 - Reader-friendly summaries of bills currently in or reported out of committee?

GVN: In the information/internet age, there is no excuse for failing to do this.

- 4. Legislative Transparency -- Part II. Legislators only vote to change the rules at the start of the legislative session, but all legislators can model transparency on their own throughout the session. Would you commit to doing the following...?**
 - Standing for a recorded vote when a colleague asks for one on any amendment which you have co-sponsored?
 - Making your committee votes available online on your website?

GVN: I look forward to standing with my colleagues for roll call votes. In addition, publicly reporting committee votes should be the responsibility of and standard operating procedure for the committees, not the responsibility of individual senators and representatives.

- 5. State House Culture. Do you support the creation an independent commission to investigate and report on complaints of workplace and sexual harassment in the Massachusetts Legislature?**

GVN: YES.

I worked on the bill introduced by Senator Rausch in the last session, which was based on the bill introduced by Senator Eldridge in prior sessions, that would do exactly this.

- 6. Public Campaign Financing. Our campaign finance system favors incumbency and discriminates against potential candidates who do not have a ready pool of wealthy donors. Do you support the creation of a robust public financing system for state elections?**

GVN: YES.

It is cost-prohibitive for many nontraditional candidates to run for office. We need these voices and life experiences setting public policy today more than ever.

7. **Removing Barriers to Running.** The cost of child care can prove prohibitive to working mothers or fathers seeking to run for office. Would you support legislation to explicitly allow working parents running for office to use campaign funds to pay for child care?

GVN: YES.

It is simply embarrassing that the FEC permits child care costs to be paid as a campaign expense and Massachusetts does not. There is no reason to delay this needed reform.

8. **Voting Access.** Which of the following policies to increase voter participation do you support?

a. Election Day Registration?

b. The expansion of early voting to municipal elections and primaries?

c. No-fault absentee voting?

d. Ending the disenfranchisement of prisoners serving with felony convictions (Their right to vote was taken away by ballot twenty years ago)?

GVN: As Senator Rausch's General Counsel and Legislative Director, I worked on a package of election reform bills she introduced this session and I look forward to continuing this work.

9. **Ranked Choice Voting.** Do you support the 2020 ballot initiative to adopt ranked choice voting for state, county, and (non-presidential) federal elections?

GVN: YES.

I have had extensive experience with RCV because this is how student government elections were run at my college. RCV does exactly what its supporters say: it reduces acrimony in campaigns, it makes voters feel more engaged and invested,, as a second- or third-place choice may be elected when the top choice isn't, and it more accurately reflects the sentiment of voters.

10. **Election Integrity.** Do you support requiring **risk-limiting audits** of election results, in which a statistically significant percentage of ballots are hand counted to ensure that the reported winner was the actual winner, preserving the integrity of elections from foreign interference, technological glitches, or simple human error?

GVN: YES.

Ensuring free and fair elections is one of the most fundamental responsibilities of government.

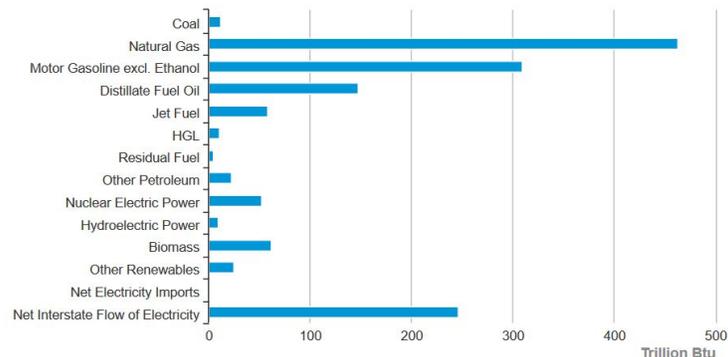
H. Sustainable Infrastructure and Environmental Protection

As a coastal state, Massachusetts will be hit particularly hard by climate change, but we are not responding with the necessary urgency. In order to avoid catastrophic climate change, global carbon emissions need to be [halved by 2030](#) and brought to net zero by 2050. In 2016, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the state has failed to meet its legal obligation to set and enforce annual limits on greenhouse gas emissions as outlined in the 2008 Global Warming Solutions Act. Setting and reaching these goals will require the decarbonization of our state economy and a transition away from fossil fuels toward clean, renewable sources of energy. In light of congressional gridlock at the federal level, state government must take a role in incentivizing reduced carbon usage and assisting in coordination between agencies and moving forward local government understanding of looming climate threats.

Public transit must play a role in decarbonizing our transportation system, as well as advancing complementary goals of equity and inclusion. However, Massachusetts politicians have lost their understanding of public transit as a public good that benefits all residents and businesses in Massachusetts, not just those who use it in their daily lives. The greatest evidence of this is their neglect of the MBTA: its debt has grown to nearly [\\$5 billion](#), and it would need [more than \\$10 billion](#) to bring infrastructure and equipment up to a state of good repair. Regional Transit Authorities that serve communities, including Gateway Cities across the state, face enormous capital needs as well.

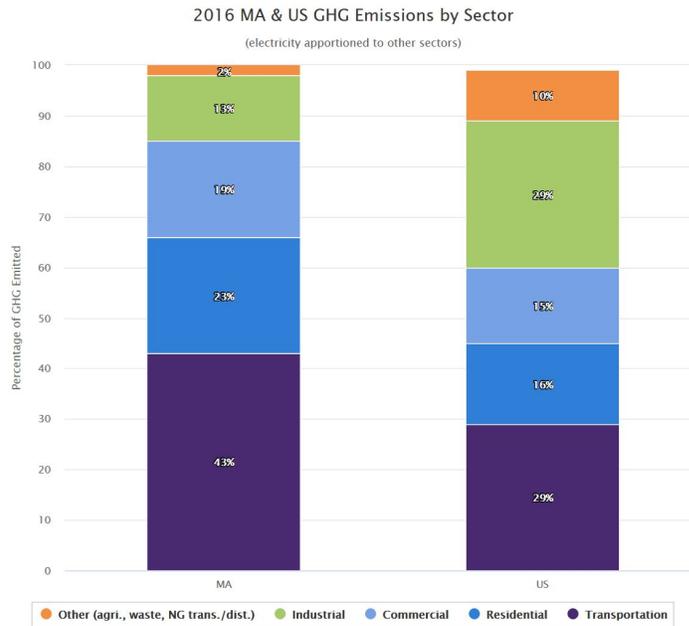
Despite recent progress, Massachusetts is still overwhelmingly dependent on fossil fuels.

Massachusetts Energy Consumption Estimates, 2017



Source: Energy Information Administration, State Energy Data System

Transportation is currently the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in MA.



(Source: <http://www.mass.gov>)

- 1. Please explain your principles and proposals as relate to this issue, and what work you personally have done to advance them (legislation, community work, published writings, etc.).**

GVN: I am not a scientist or an environmental expert and I often feel overwhelmed by the climate catastrophe that's unfolding all around us. I've done what I can throughout my life -- raised money for environmental causes and advocated for policies and laws to protect the environment, worked to expand recycling and composting, commuted by foot, bike and public transit and supported the expansion of bike lanes, bike shares, and public transit, supported reuse organizations such as Boston Building Resources in Roxbury, advocated for community gardens and green space and fought for trees. Although I'm not an environmental expert, I am a fighter and expert advocate and will support with every fiber of my being the proposals and legislation put forward by scientists and experts at the State House and in our communities who are developing solutions and know what we need to do to save our planet and the vulnerable communities most impacted by climate change.

- 2. Waste Reduction. Would you support a statewide ban on single-use shopping bags and a requirement that alternatives be more sustainable?**

GVN: YES.

It's incredibly frustrating that there is a temporary ban on reusable bags. When that ban is lifted, a state-wide ban on single-use plastic bags should replace it.

- 3. Solar Energy. Do you support increasing equitable access to solar power by removing caps on solar generation and restoring compensation for low-income and community solar?**

GVN: YES.

We must make solar energy affordable and accessible to everyone.

4. **Renewable Energy. Do you support a target of 100% renewable energy economy-wide by 2045 and 100% renewable electricity by 2035?**

GVN: YES.

We must do everything in our power to reach these goals even sooner!

5. **Environmental Justice. Successive gubernatorial administrations have made verbal commitments to environmental justice (EJ), and Governor Deval Patrick issued an Executive Order on Environmental Justice in 2014 which has not been implemented. Would you support efforts to codify EJ into law?**

GVN: YES.

Particularly now, as we rebuild our economy, we need this law to ensure an equitable recovery.

6. **Fossil Fuel Infrastructure. Do you oppose the expansion of gas pipelines in the state?**

GVN: YES.

There is absolutely no need for the Weymouth Compressor Station or the East Boston Substation and both construction projects should be halted immediately.

7. **Carbon Pricing. Do you support imposing a fee on carbon emissions and using some of the revenue to invest in green infrastructure, especially in frontline communities?**

GVN: YES.

The true cost of carbon emissions on human health and the environment is currently invisible. We must change that.

8. **Public Transportation. Will you oppose any fare increases to the MBTA or regional transit authorities and work toward the goal of fare-free public transit?**

GVN: YES.

I have long advocated for free public transportation, as both a social justice and environmental imperative. Free public transit has now been adopted in enough localities around the world that we know it has a deeply transformative effect, in countless positive ways.

9. **Regional Transportation Funding. The unavailability of state funds for infrastructure spending has meant the deterioration of regional transportation systems. Do you support allowing municipalities to place a question on the ballot to raise revenue for local and regional transportation projects?**

GVN: YES.

I hate to admit it, but I knew nothing about RTAs before working as General Counsel and Legislative Director for Senator Rausch. My eyes have been opened to the critical need for investment and expansion of RTAs across our Commonwealth.

III. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Limit answer to 150 words or fewer.

Use this space to add any other issues important to your vision for Massachusetts or any other matter you think progressive voters should know about your candidacy.

GVN: Thank you for this thorough and thoughtful questionnaire. The process of seeking your endorsement makes all of us better candidates. I sought your endorsement two years ago, for an election that I thought was one of the most important in our lifetime, given the new occupant of the White House. I was wrong. We don't know when this pandemic will end, but we do know that life will never be the same. During this time, we need leaders who are not the same. As a civil rights attorney in the courtroom, I have pushed the law forward to recognize and protect the marginalized and invisible. As an advocate and activist outside the courtroom, I have pushed for change in existing systems and the creation of new systems to make our communities and our Commonwealth more livable and just. I've written more legal briefs than I'll ever be able to count, testified and lobbied and protested countless times at the State House, drafted both simple and complex legislation to address pressing needs, and brought people together again and again to develop progressive and sustainable solutions to the problems we face. These are the experiences and strengths that will be needed in abundance in our communities and on Beacon Hill in the coming months and years. The 2020 election is the most important in our lifetime and I hope I have earned your support.