



**PROGRESSIVE MASSACHUSETTS
2020 LEGISLATIVE
ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Date: 5/10/2020

Candidate: Meg Wheeler

Office Sought: State Senate, Plymouth & Norfolk

Party: Democratic

Website: <https://megwheeler.com>

Twitter: @MegSenate

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

Instagram: @MegWheelerForStateSenate

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?

MW: State government has never been more important. As we're seeing our rights eroded at the national level, it's up to state and local legislatures to enact laws to protect us against dysfunction, corruption and inhumanity. From ensuring women have the right to choose, safeguarding immigrants' rights and keeping our kids safe from gun violence at school, we need bold action and we need it now. But our communities are also struggling with the climate crisis, massive economic inequality and the need for quality and affordable health care, mental health care and treatment for substance use disorders. These are all big problems and they're ones we need to take action on now.

I decided to run for State Senate because I believe that we need more small business owners to fight against corporate greed, with workers to protect their rights and for grants and incentives to further innovation. I believe that we need more moms in the Senate, to intimately understand the stress of rising daycare costs and outdated schools, and to fight for gun control like their kids' lives depend on it, because they do. And I believe that we need more women in the Senate, to understand the unique challenges of being a woman in what is still a very male-dominated world. I decided to run because I believe that together, we can solve the big problems before us and that it's time for a leader who will bring new ideas, a strong voice and bold action to represent us in the State House.

I am running because we need an advocate who will boldly address the issues facing our communities. My top 3 legislative priorities are: 1) restoring our economy and seeking economic justice, 2) implementing universal child care and 3) solving the climate crisis. Too many of our residents are still making less than a livable wage, struggling to afford adequate housing, overwhelmed by medical bills (or lacking access to quality and affordable health care) and living paycheck to paycheck. This situation has been made worse by COVID-19. My financial background will be an asset as the State works to restore our economy. Secondly, we need universal child care. Massachusetts has the 2nd highest childcare costs in the country, and many families pay 30-50% of their household income on daycare alone. Lastly, we need a more aggressive plan to combat the climate crisis, with a goal of 100% renewable energy by 2045.

2. What prepares you to serve in this capacity?

MW: When I asked my friends how they would describe me in 3 words, they said: problem solver, passionate and advocate. I couldn't think of better words to describe who I am. Growing up the daughter of a single mom, I learned how to overcome challenges at an early age. As the member of a nearly all-female family, I learned the power of being a woman and was raised to believe that women can do anything they set their minds to. It never occurred to me this was not the way society saw it. In high school and into college, a battle with mental health tested my strength and increased my resiliency, and I channeled my energy into becoming an advocate for various causes I believed in - Students Against Drunk Driving, raising money to support the student scholarship fund, gender inequality, especially in the economy (I was, after all, an Economics major). After college, I went into real estate because I loved helping people find their homes - and that's when I truly grasped the importance of "home" and what it must be like for the countless people who don't have one.

Years later, as the economy tanked, I turned my focus to accounting, receiving an MBA and MS-Accounting from Northeastern before taking on a tax role at a public accounting firm. I learned quickly that I didn't enjoy compliance and so I found myself knee deep in international tax strategy, which gave me the chance to learn about the world and how other economies work. I left public accounting because I didn't want big corporations as clients anymore, and so I took a job with Harvard's endowment, overseeing the international tax strategy for their natural resources portfolio. I thought that by working for the endowment, I'd be helping an important cause, as the endowment funds student scholarships, medical research and other good causes.

While I enjoyed my time there, I quickly found myself wanting to have even more of an impact and that led to the decision which catapulted me into being a small business owner. I quit and started my first company, One For Women, an online gift business connecting women and supporting women makers. That led to my first podcast, One For Womenkind, which focused on the power of small gestures and how we can support women through simple, daily actions.

But I knew that I still wasn't fulfilling my full impact, and so I started my second business, a business and financial education firm, focused on empowering and educating women business owners to run financially fit and profitable businesses. Now, I work with women all over the country to gain the confidence they need to truly build incredible businesses.

Sprinkled in through all of this time was serving as a member of the Junior Board of the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra, a term as the volunteer Director of Development and Board Member of the Junior League of Boston, a member of my town's advisory committee, and of course, the birth of my now 3-year old son, Jack.

With professional experience in the real estate, public accounting and entrepreneurial fields, along with an MBA and Masters in Accounting and an (expired) Certified Public Accountant license, I am well qualified for this role. Over my entire career, my biggest strengths have been coalition building and problem solving, and it is these skills that are much needed now as we face complicated issues in our district. More importantly though, I am a mom, a small business owner, a homeowner and a vocal activist for Progressive issues. I believe that we need a State Senator who has real world professional experience, and can understand the challenges that working families face in our district.

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

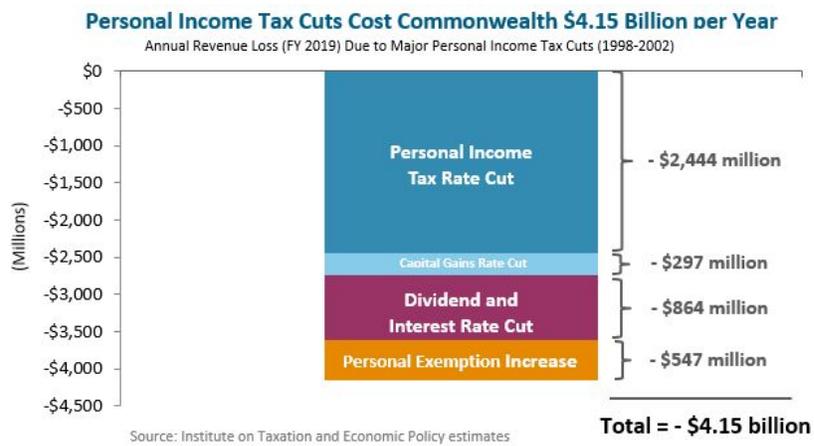
MW: The biggest obstacle to passing progressive policy is the lack of transparency and accountability at the state level, which results in many pieces of progressive legislation getting stuck in committee. This is why I have laid out my commitments to transparency and accountability, which include publicizing all of my votes (committee and floor, voice and roll call) and standing for roll call votes. In addition, I am calling for term limits of 8 years for State Senators, to ensure that no elected official becomes too entrenched; campaign finance reform to reduce the influence of money in our elections and statewide vote-by-mail for all elections, so that every eligible Massachusetts resident can exercise their right to vote.

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.).**

MW: As a former CPA, I saw firsthand how tax laws are used to shape society's behavior around the world. For better or for worse, tax laws play a critical role in making it clear what societies prioritize, and in driving growth, innovation and equality.

Therefore, we need to overhaul our state's tax code to prioritize workers and small businesses while eliminating incentives and handouts to large corporations and wealthy individuals to ensure they are paying their fair share.

Given the current economic impacts of COVID-19, I would likely not support an across-the-board tax increase, which would disproportionately affect low-income and middle-income families, but do support a suite of tax increases on income items over a certain threshold.

This includes increasing the tax rate on interest and dividend income, closing the capital gains tax loophole, adding a surtax on incomes over \$1,000,000, as well as building in accountability and transparency into tax incentives to ensure corporations that are receiving them are using them wisely.

But more importantly, I want to implement tax code changes that prioritize changes critically needed here in Massachusetts - clean energy and jobs, fully-funded public school education, affordable higher education, fair and adequate pay for workers, and access to quality and affordable healthcare for all.

- 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?**

- Collecting and publicly disclosing information about the benefits to the state from any tax break?
- Repealing any tax break that does not provide the intended benefits in a cost-effective manner?
- Establishing sunset dates for all tax breaks so that they must come up for periodic review?

MW: Transparency is a cornerstone of my campaign, and I believe that we need more accountability measures built into the bills passed in the State Senate, and that we need to stop giving handouts to major corporations. Our current tax system is set up to benefit wealthy corporations and overly burdens working and lower income families.

- 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")?**

MW: YES.

- 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?**
 - Raising the corporate minimum tax for larger companies? (The corporate minimum tax is currently only \$456.)
 - Imposing a tax on the portion of corporations' US profits that are shifted to offshore tax havens?
 - 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?

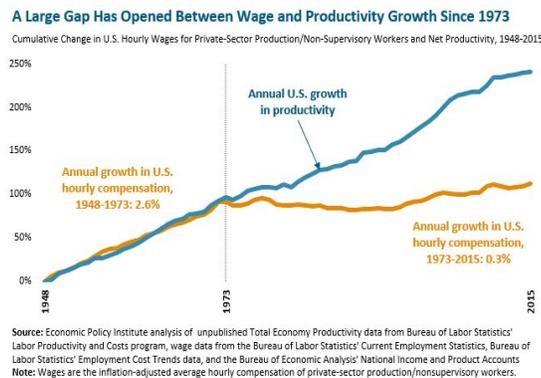
MW: As someone with extensive tax experience, I will bring a wealth of experience to the State Senate to craft meaningful tax reform that will support working families, lower-income taxpayers and small businesses. I support all of the above policies but would want to ensure they are written so as not to push the burden of the tax increase onto those who can least afford it.

B. Jobs and the Economy

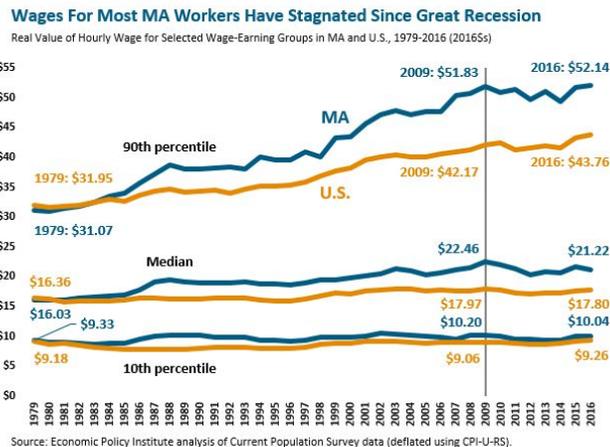
Massachusetts ranks as one of the top ten [most unequal states](#), as the gains from economic growth have disproportionately benefited the already well-off. Compounding this, we are one of the most expensive states in the country for [health care](#), [housing](#), and [child care](#), all of which 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.



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



- 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.).**

MW: Economic inequality is one of the biggest issues we're facing in Massachusetts. Despite having universal health care, insurance costs have nearly doubled in the last 10 years. Massachusetts has the second-highest cost of childcare and the fourth-highest cost of housing in this country.

When I'm in the State Senate, economic inequality will be one of my top priorities; that's why I've recently announced my plan to support workers, which includes calling for a \$17/hour minimum wage to start immediately and be indexed for inflation annually, eliminating the tipped wage, implementing single-payer healthcare, implementing universal child care capped at 7% of family's household income and further strengthening of unions and collective bargaining agreements (this plan can be viewed here: <https://www.megwheeler.com/workers>). In the next few weeks, I will be introducing additional plans to support small business owners and affordable housing.

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

MW: YES.

- 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?**

MW: YES.

- 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?**

MW: YES.

- 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?**

MW: YES.

- 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?**

MW: YES.

- 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?**

MW: YES.

C. Education

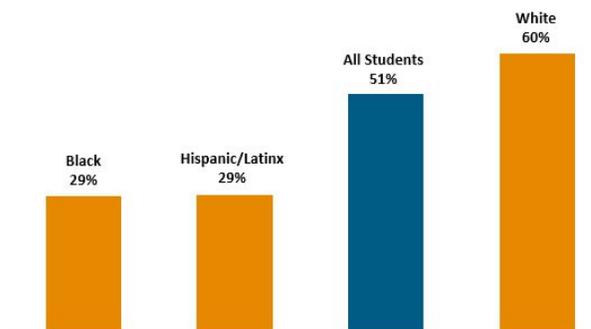
The promise of public education has always been as a gateway to opportunity and mobility for all, regardless of economic circumstances, a cornerstone of the American dream for all residents. Although our public education system gets high marks overall, it remains one of the [most unequal](#) in the country. 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

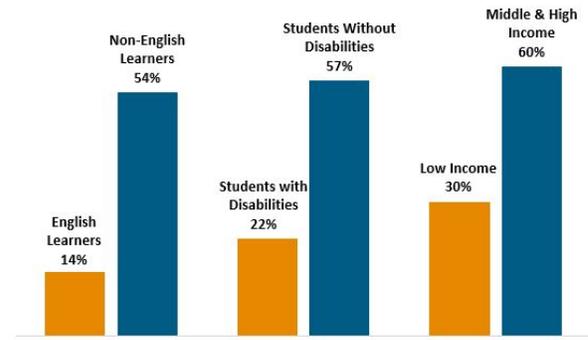
Share of MA 4th Graders Proficient on the 2017 NAEP Reading Exam, by Student Race, all students



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

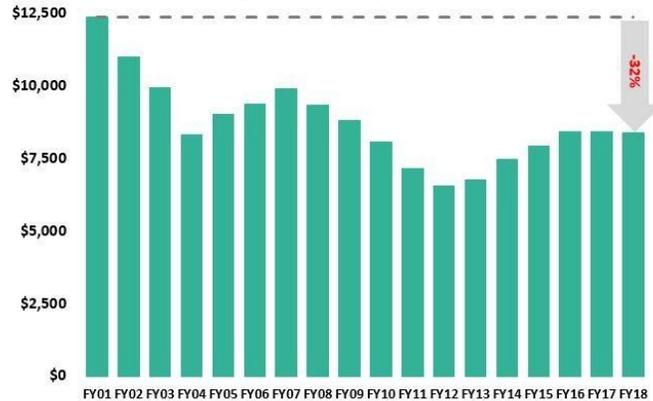


Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2017

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.).**

MW: As the daughter of an elementary school teacher and a mom myself, I care deeply about our education system and ensuring EVERY student in our state has equal access to a quality education. This includes raising teacher pay, eliminating high-stakes standardized tests, implementing universal full-day kindergarten, and ensuring that the Student Opportunity Act is fully disbursed.

For the last several years, the debate over charter schools has come front and center, but I think it distracts from the need to fully fund our public schools. While I recognize and support the value that charter schools in certain situations, I am opposed to privately run for-profit charter schools with little accountability or oversight.

As someone with massive student loan debt, I know firsthand the shackles a higher education comes with. It's imperative that we identify ways to provide low- or no-cost higher education to our residents to ensure no student has to forego continuing their education or find themselves in unbearable debt.

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

MW: YES.

- 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?**

MW: For too many children, their schools are their only source of stability. The Student Opportunity Act is essential to ensure children all over the Commonwealth have access to a quality education, but this is threatened by the anticipated revenue shortfall of COVID-19. As a State Senator, I will do everything in my power to make sure the state follows through with its promises for funding. This includes using my financial background to devise creative solutions to avoid major budget cuts, prioritizing initiatives that will reinvigorate our economy (such as a clean jobs program, universal child care and grants/loans to small business owners)

and being a vocal advocate of the Student Opportunity Act so no legislator forgets the reason it was passed in the first place.

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.)

MW: YES.

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.**

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?**

MW: YES.

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

MW: YES.

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

MW: YES.

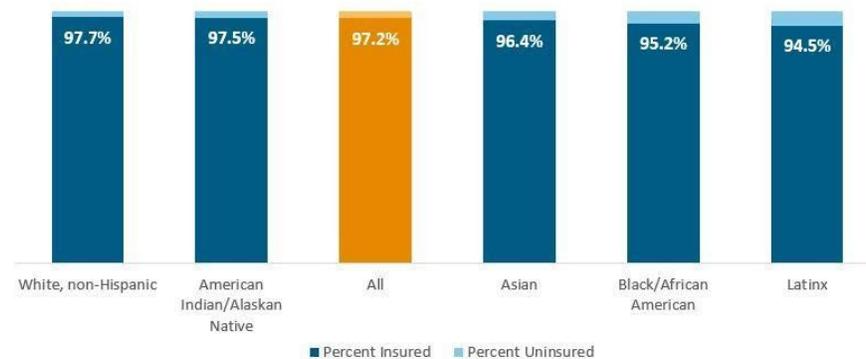
D. Health Care

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.

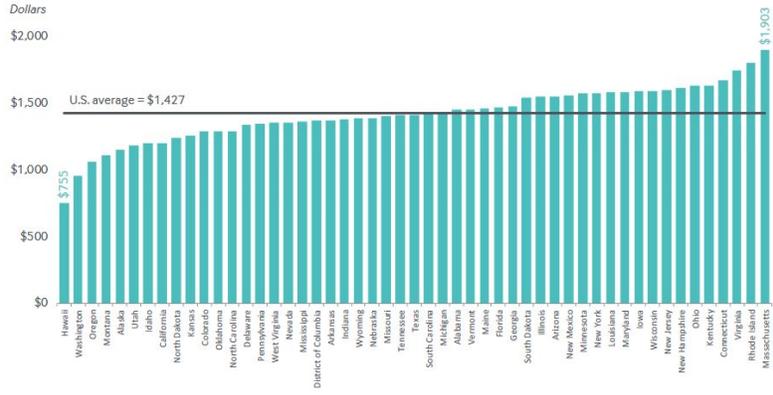


Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey.

**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.

Average Annual Employee Premium Contribution for Single Coverage, by State, 2018



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.).**

MW: Stories of people dying because they couldn't afford healthcare, or going bankrupt because of medical bills have become all too common. And in the wake of COVID-19, we've seen firsthand the dangers of a lack of access to quality and affordable healthcare.

Despite Massachusetts having enacted universal health care, too many residents are still uninsured or lack access to quality and affordable health care. Every Massachusetts resident deserves this access, and it should not be reliant on our employment status. In the event of a job loss or the inability to work, too many Massachusetts residents are going without the care they need, and this is unacceptable.

Single payer healthcare is the best way to bring quality healthcare to all residents and overall it would cost less. ALL Massachusetts residents deserve access to quality and affordable healthcare and we need it NOW. I will advocate for a single-payer healthcare system which will decrease health care costs while still providing the same quality health care (and in many cases, increasing the quality and level of services). And this access will not change regardless of employment status.

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

MW: YES.

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?**

MW: YES.

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?**

MW: YES.

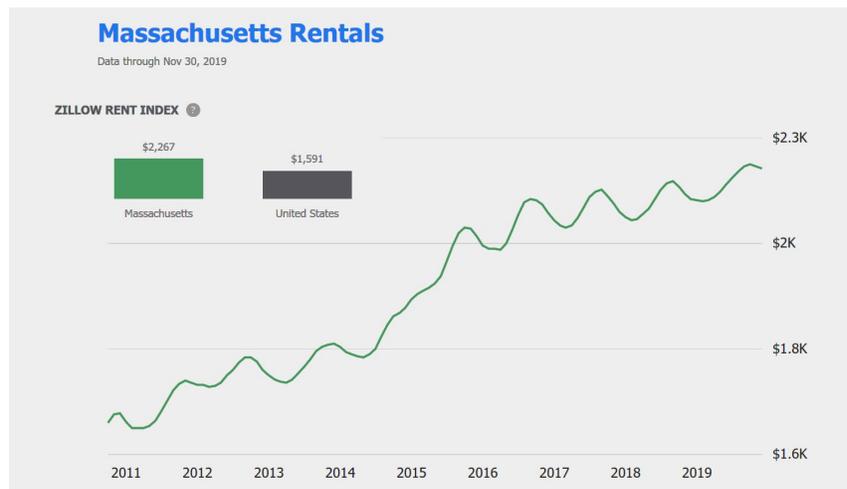
5. **Pandemic Response. How would you evaluate the state's response to the Covid-19 pandemic?**

MW: Too many residents have been left behind in the state's response. They failed to provide adequate protections and benefits (such as PPE, hazard pay and sick leave) to frontline workers, financial assistance to small business owners and lower income families, and just treatment to immigrants, incarcerated individuals and disenfranchised communities, for whom we're seeing the effects of COVID-19 hit the hardest. Amongst all of this, we saw the Governor allow non-essential construction like the Weymouth Compressor Station to continue, and the House try to push through rules that would quiet dissent and diminish our democracy. We are now looking at the reopening of our state without any comprehensive plan, input from core stakeholders (such as teachers, unions, the hardest hit communities) and no solution for how to protect our frontline workers and for parents to manage childcare.

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)

- 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.).**

MW: Every single resident deserves to make a livable wage sufficient to afford safe and adequate housing. As a member of the Cohasset Advisory Committee and liaison to the Affordable Housing Committee, I have seen the increased challenges towns are facing to provide sufficient affordable housing options. In the wake of COVID-19, it's imperative that we take actions to restore our economy and spur economic growth. One of the best ways to do this is to expand affordable housing options (not just in number but in accessibility to transportation) to encourage more workers to stay in our state.

- 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?**

MW: YES.

- 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?**

MW: YES.

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?

MW: YES.

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?

MW: YES.

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.

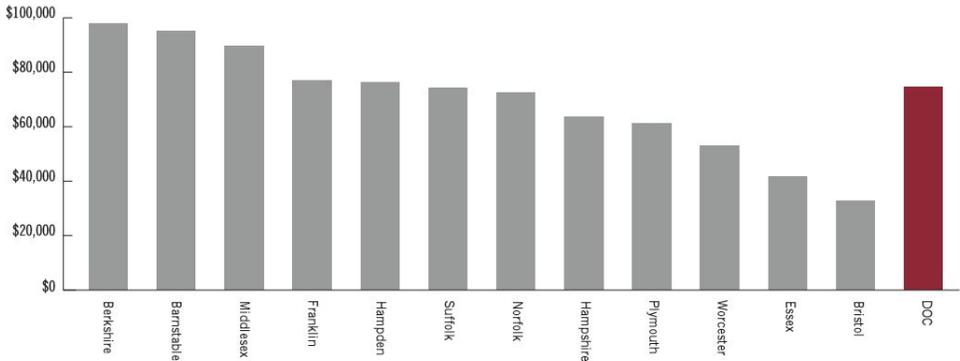
Immigrants make up 16% of Massachusetts’s population; however, demagoguery against, or indifference to, immigrant populations has historically been a mainstay of Massachusetts politics. As the Trump administration in Washington ramps up a xenophobic mass deportation agenda, it is important for states 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.).

MW: Our current criminal justice system is failing both those who are incarcerated and our communities, and it's disproportionately hurting communities of color. Instead of spending more than \$60,000 per year per person, we should be investing in our communities, our schools, our small businesses and our job training programs – all important factors in reducing crime.

Furthermore, we need to stop treating public health issues as crimes and instead recognize them for the addictions they are. Instead of imprisonment, we need to support sentencing reform and treatment programs.

My husband and I have had the unique opportunity to welcome a refugee from Angola into our home. He is seeking political asylum from atrocities I will not detail here (as it is not my story to tell).

Over the past 6 months that he has lived with us, we have seen firsthand the injustices of our immigration system. He has no identification because his passport was confiscated and ICE has refused to return it. He does not drive because he has been advised that any infraction while driving would severely jeopardize his asylum case (assuming he can even get a driver's license or a social security number, which as of right now, he can't). He is not able to work because the application to get a work permit takes at least 6 months, and that is once you have applied for asylum; the application for asylum took several months just to complete.

But all of this pales in comparison to the fear he and other immigrants have – fear over being returned to prison, fear of being sent home. Fear of not being able to work and not support themselves, fear of retribution and harassment. We are a country built of immigrants, but our current practices do not reflect that. When I am in the State Senate, I will do everything in my power to be a vocal advocate for our immigrant communities and to ensure basic human and civil rights are championed and protected here in our Commonwealth.

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

MW: YES.

Police officers are integral to our communities and I have a lot of respect for the work they do and the risks they take every single day. As a member of the Cohasset Advisory Committee and the liaison to the Police Department, I have seen the challenges that police departments face as they deal with increased risks and shrinking budgets. I believe that an independent review of police shootings will help increase the trust and respect communities have for their police force and ensure that appropriate actions are taken.

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?

- a. Eliminating mandatory minimums for opioid-related offenses?
- b. 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?
- c. Decriminalizing consensual sexual activity between adolescents, by creating an exception to the statutory rape law for youth close in age?
- d. Eliminating the sentence of life without parole, which is costly and has been shown to be racist in its application?

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?

MW: YES.

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?

MW: YES.

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?

MW: YES.

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?

MW: YES.

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

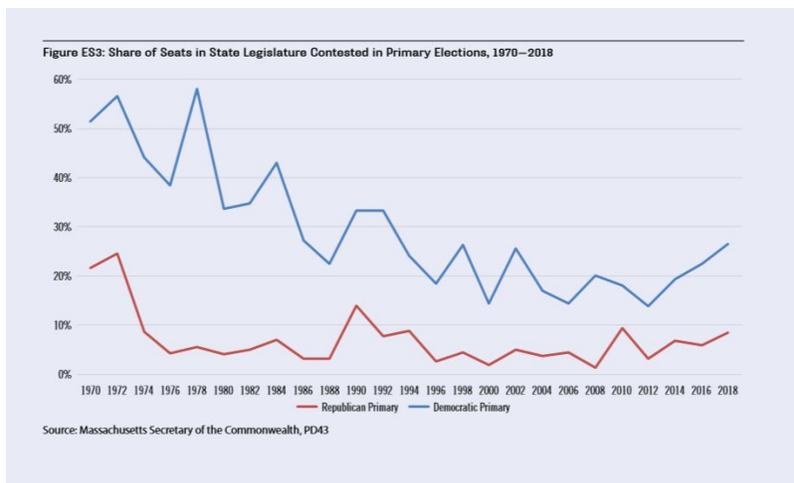
MW: YES.

G. Good Government and Strong Democracy

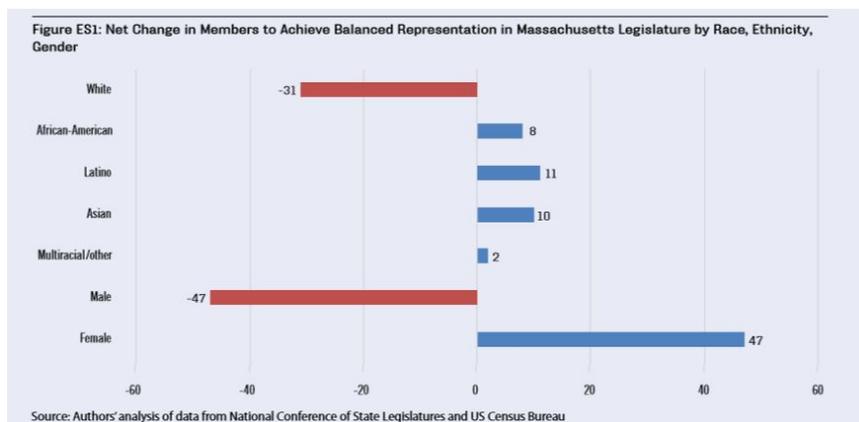
A strong democracy depends on a transparent and representative government and an engaged public. Too often, however, we see centralized, unaccountable power and barriers to participation. An undemocratic, centralized power structure on Beacon Hill makes it easier for lobbyists to target the top and undermine 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.).

MW: Over the last few years, we have seen the realities of a political system that favors entrenched incumbents and money-purchased power over the voices of the voters. We must prioritize access to voting to ensure that all eligible voters are able to exercise their democratic right. This includes same-day voter registration, early voting for local elections and primaries, no-fault absentee voting, and restoring the right to vote to people who are imprisoned.

I am a strong advocate for ranked-choice voting, and I also believe we need to implement a statewide vote-by-mail process, where a ballot is automatically mailed to every voter, permanently (and not just limited to the 2020 election).

Transparency and accountability of our elected officials are also critical and a priority for me when I'm in the State Senate. Knowing how our legislators vote is crucial to a fair democracy and this transparency is currently severely lacking in our State House.

My campaign has taken steps to ensure a transparent and accountable campaign, and once I am in the State Senate, that those practices continue. I have created and signed the "Responsible Campaign Pledge" (learn more at megwheeler.com/pledge) which among many other things, outlines my policy on who this campaign will and will not accept funding from. It's imperative we get big money and "dark money" out of politics and I am proud that this campaign runs on grassroots donors.

To further my commitment to transparency in my campaign, we are publishing a list of all of voters and endorsements on my website (updated monthly); the average voter is not aware of OCPF nor knows how to determine the donors to a particular campaign, so this removes the barrier of finding that information. I am also publishing, on my website, my responses to all endorsement questionnaires I complete, to the extent allowed by the endorsing organization.

Additionally, I have laid out my plan for being a more accountable and transparent State Senator. This includes publishing ALL of my votes (committee or floor, voice or roll call) on my website, as well as standing for roll call when any member, regardless of party, requests one. I am proud to have signed Act On Mass's Voters Deserve to Know Pledge.

Lastly, I fully support term limits for State Senators, to prevent entrenched Senators and ensure our representatives reflect the diversity and attitudes of the people.

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?

MW: YES.

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...?

- a. All committee votes, whether taken by electronic poll or formal roll call?
- b. All written testimony submitted for or against bills?
- c. Reader-friendly summaries of bills currently in or reported out of committee?

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...?

- a. Standing for a recorded vote when a colleague asks for one on any amendment which you have co-sponsored?
- b. Making your committee votes available online on your website?

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?

MW: YES.

Yes, and I would also like to explore ways to expand this to cover political campaigns.

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?

MW: YES.

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?

MW: YES.

Yes, however I would expand this to include care for all family members, not just children.

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)?

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

MW: YES.

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?

MW: YES.

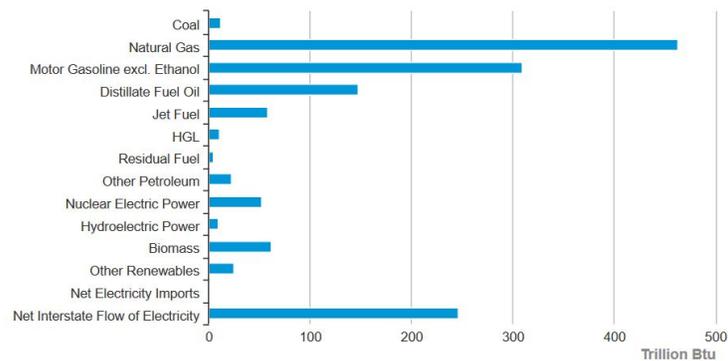
H. Sustainable Infrastructure and Environmental Protection

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.

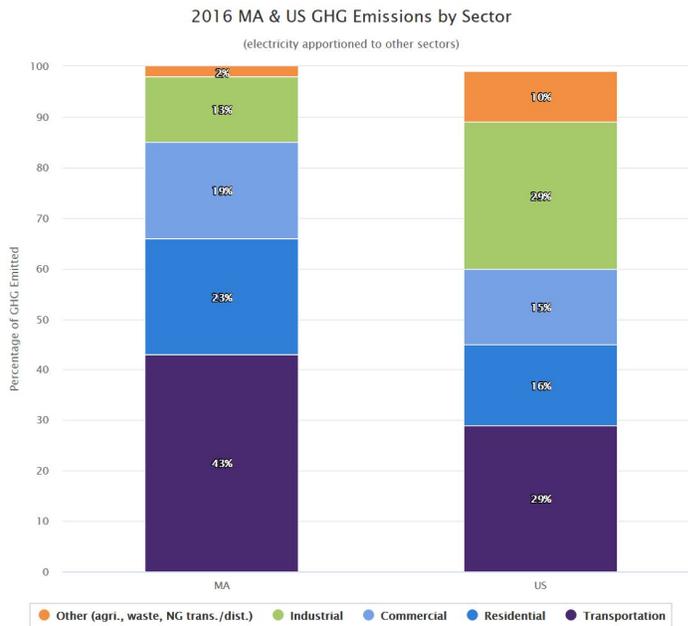
Despite recent progress, Massachusetts is still overwhelmingly dependent on fossil fuels.

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.).

MW: We need comprehensive climate change action and there’s no time to wait. As a district with primarily coastal towns, we have felt firsthand the effects of the damage we’ve done and while our elected officials have made some progress on this issue, we need bolder action.

What's been made clear in recent years is just how little the voices of underserved and overburdened communities are listened to in this state. From the siting of energy infrastructure (like the Weymouth compressor), to the establishment/implementation of solar regulations (which still do not provide access for the majority of low-income families), to our broken and inadequate transportation system, to the decisions on how to adapt to climate change impacts (community members from Brockton to Chelsea to Haverhill are systemically left out of resilience planning).

I will support any legislation that authentically empowers environmental justice and frontline communities, giving them not just a seat at the table but the ability to decide the energy and climate future of their communities. This should include both the placement of energy and climate infrastructure, as well as deciding how to spend any potential revenue generated.

My priorities include:

1. 100% Renewable Energy by 2045: If we want to decarbonize our entire economy (especially transportation & heating) then we need an electric grid that is 100% renewable energy. This should be met with a combination of aggressive new offshore wind development and incentives for residential solar, coupled with expanded battery storage technology. If we do this, while eliminating natural gas, Massachusetts would go further than ever towards meeting our climate goals.

2. Green New Deal for Jobs in Massachusetts: We’re facing the deepest recession in a century, with unemployment in Massachusetts at an all time high. We need to put people to work,

create jobs, and help our struggling local communities. As Senator, I would immediately release and push for comprehensive legislation to fund a green jobs program, open to all, that would provide a paycheck, health insurance, and skills training to all participants. Its members would focus on installing residential solar, energy efficiency through heat pumps, restoring/protecting our open spaces, among other things.

3. **Overhauling our transportation system:** The transportation sector is responsible for one third of our greenhouse gases, so any overhaul of our public transportation system must include a plan to transition to a green system. Additionally, we need to expand options to ensure that all Massachusetts residents have access to affordable public transportation.

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

MW: YES.

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?**

MW: YES.

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

MW: YES.

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?**

MW: YES.

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

MW: YES.

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?**

MW: YES.

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?**

MW: YES.

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?**

MW: YES.

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.