



**PROGRESSIVE MASSACHUSETTS
2020 LEGISLATIVE
ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Date: 5/7/2020

Candidate: Steve Owens

Office Sought: State Representative, 29th Middlesex

Party: Democratic

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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?

SO: I am running for office to help Massachusetts lead in the fight against climate change, create a more sustainable and equitable economy, and improve our transportation system and housing policy to work for people of all ages, incomes & backgrounds. My professional expertise is in transportation, so that would be a legislative priority, as would environmental and housing policy. These three issues are inexorably linked – people need housing near jobs or transit, otherwise long commutes will put more carbon in the atmosphere, exacerbating climate change.

2. What prepares you to serve in this capacity?

SO: For the past 15 years, I have been working to get progressives elected in Watertown and beyond. I have been pushing progressive issues locally both as the chair of the Watertown Democratic Town Committee and as a member of the Democratic State Committee. During this time, I have assembled a network of progressive and Democratic activists in Watertown who are supporting my candidacy. I have a track record of pushing the party along a more progressive path and hope to do so in the legislature.

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

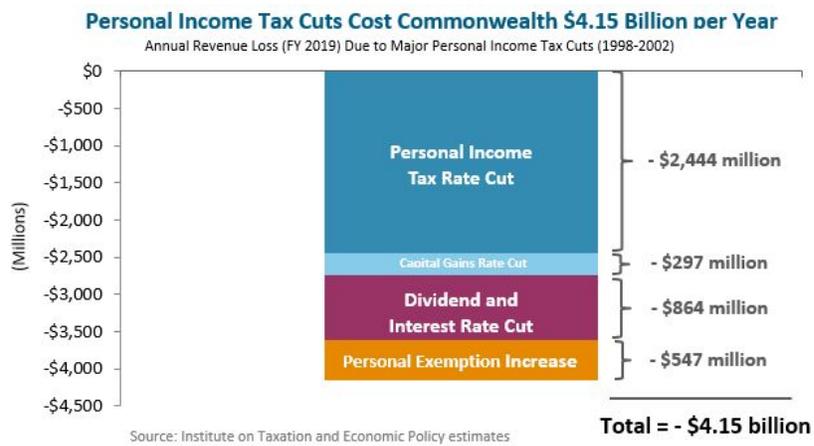
SO: The House has a top-down leadership style and the priorities of the leadership are the ones that get passed. Right now it seems that progressives are only able to achieve policy progress where leadership allows them. Many of these decisions are made behind closed doors. I have watched my current state representative Jonathan Hecht fight for a more open House and I hope to continue in his footsteps.

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.).**

SO: Flat taxes are regressive – Massachusetts should be working toward a graduated taxation program. Sales and consumption taxes are particularly regressive, as those who can afford them the most are affected the least. We should not be afraid of corporate taxes – our workforce is one of the best in the world and companies should be fighting over us rather than us luring them here with tax incentives. I worked to advance the Fair Share amendment locally, organizing signature drives and community meetings and presentations. In 2010, I led an effort by the DTC to oppose the reduction of the income tax to 3% with a door-knocking & voter education campaign for a No vote on the initiative.

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?

SO: We need 100% accountability in all tax breaks provided to corporations, and should provide for clawbacks where corporate tax breaks do not live up to promises in terms of benefits (jobs, offsetting economic activity). All tax breaks should be subject to periodic review. If they are not providing benefits proportional to their impact on the state budget, they should be reduced or repealed.

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”)?**

SO: YES.

I would support and advocate for the Millionaire’s Tax and have done so as chair of the Watertown DTC.

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?

SO: a – The current corporate minimum tax has not been changed in 30 years and should be a graduated tax based on gross Massachusetts receipts. b – Massachusetts should re-conform to GILTI to ensure corporations here pay a minimum tax on foreign income. c – Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it may not be the right time to raise the corporate tax rate while so many small businesses are in crisis, but this should be a long-term goal. d – Long-term capital gains should be raised. e – Yes. A modest tax on endowments is appropriate. We are going to have a massive shortfall due to the coronavirus pandemic and now is not the time for

austerity. It's important now that we raise revenue in a progressive way.

B. Jobs and the Economy

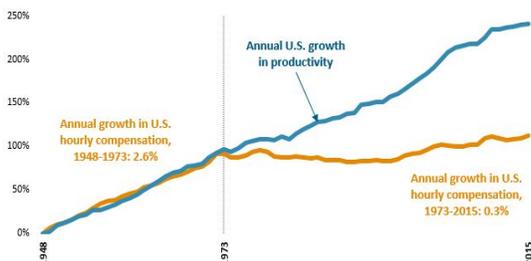
Massachusetts ranks as one of the top ten [most unequal states](#), as the gains from economic growth have disproportionately benefited the already well-off. Compounding this, we are one of the most expensive states in the country for [health care](#), [housing](#), and [child care](#), all of which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

SO: Growing income inequality is bad for society. People should be paid for the work that they do. Everyone should be paid enough to be able to provide for their basic needs – food, housing, child care. I was one of the leaders in collecting signatures in Watertown for the paid sick leave and minimum wage ballot questions before action was taken by legislature.

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

SO: 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?**

SO: 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?**

SO: YES.

Yes, hourly workers working more than 40 hours should receive overtime pay, and protections to ensure that employers are not retaliating against employees that work more than 40 hours. Employees should not get their hours cut one week to pay for last week's overtime.

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?**

SO: YES.

Workers should have the right to have advance notice of their hours and be able to make requests without retaliation in all industries where regular schedules are possible.

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?**

SO: YES.

My wife spent time as a state employee as both a member of NAGE and a non-member. As a member she was able to get pay increases and benefits that were refused her before she joined. We've seen first-hand how important collective bargaining rights are for state and municipal 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?**

SO: YES.

Mandatory arbitration most often favors the employer. Workers need a level playing field when they have disagreements with their employers. They should not be required to give up their rights as a condition of employment.

C. Education

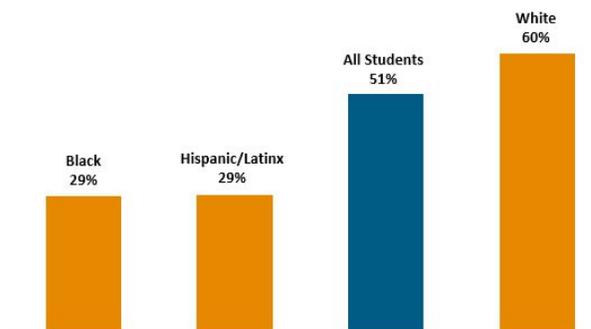
The promise of public education has always been as a gateway to opportunity and mobility for all, regardless of economic circumstances, a cornerstone of the American dream for all residents. Although our public education system gets high marks overall, it remains one of the [most unequal](#) in the country.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

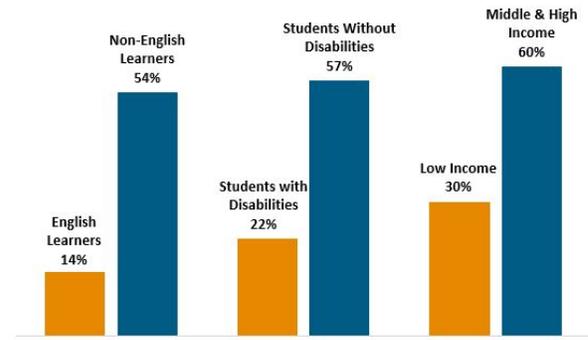
Share of MA 4th Graders Proficient on the 2017 NAEP Reading Exam, by Student Race, all students



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

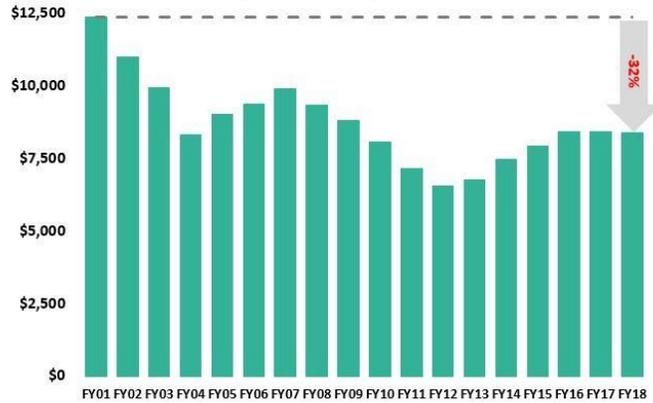


Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2017

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.).**

SO: I was the liaison between the local party and progressive organizations for the No on 2 campaign to stop the raising of the charter school cap. I grew up the son of a public school teacher, my two boys attend Watertown Public Schools and I believe strongly in the value of public education.

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

SO: YES.

My youngest went to an integrated pre-K in Watertown and we saw first-hand the difference that this makes in a child's education.

- 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?**

SO: When elected, I will use all of the methods at my disposal, including legislation and marshalling community activists to put pressure on the administration. The state made a promise to these school districts and already there are groups trying to push the state government to change the funding allocations.

- 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.)**

SO: YES.

The focus of a child's education should always be on the child, and these tests are using our children as a tool to evaluate the school. I have seen my own children spend weeks or more working on the MCAS so that administrators can evaluate their teachers. This is bad for both educators and students.

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.**

SO: In my extended family, we've seen children excessively disciplined by the out-of-state charter school they attend in order to push them out of the system. This included out-of-school suspension for children as low as kindergarten.

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?**

SO: YES.

Students should be provided age-appropriate, medically accurate, and inclusive information.

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

SO: YES.

Students who graduate from Massachusetts schools are Massachusetts students regardless of immigration status and should be treated as such for the purpose of public college tuition.

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

SO: YES.

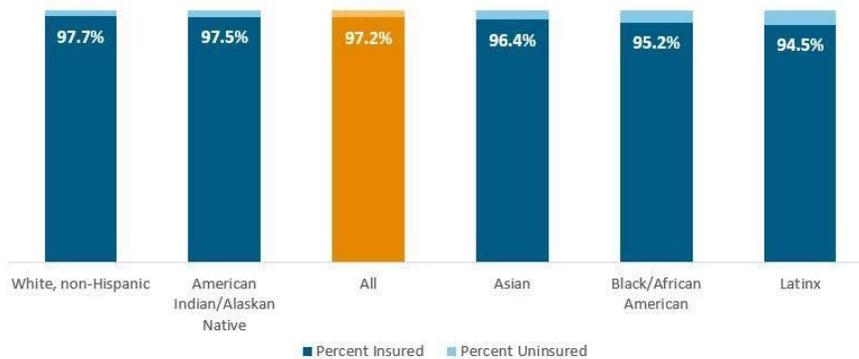
D. Health Care

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

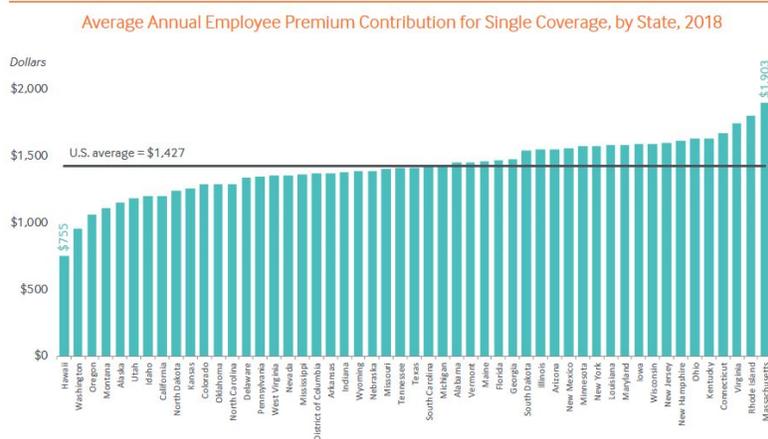
Percent with health insurance in Massachusetts, by race, 2017.



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.



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.).**

SO: I believe that health care is a human right. I believe that the goal should be healthy residents, not just insured residents. About 10% of Massachusetts residents are under-insured, which means they have insurance that they cannot afford to access. Most people in Massachusetts who have medical debt, have it despite being insured. These are problems that our system still needs to address.

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

SO: YES.

A single payer health care system would ideally be developed as a Medicare-For-All on the Federal level. Massachusetts led the US with the framework for the Affordable Care Act, it is time for us to lead again by showing how a single-payer system can work.

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?**

SO: YES.

I support the ROE Act & would vote and advocate for it or similar if it has not passed by next session.

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?**

SO: YES.

Safe Consumption Sites often give these individuals an opportunity to seek treatment that they would otherwise not have access to if their use was confined to the shadows.

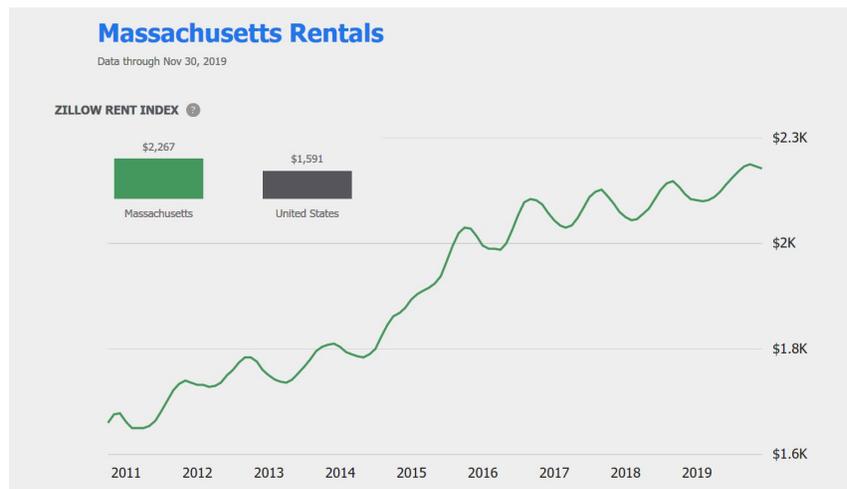
5. **Pandemic Response. How would you evaluate the state's response to the Covid-19 pandemic?**

SO: C: Governor Baker was a step behind when it came to closing the schools – individual districts had to push him before he made that decision. He did not shut down most construction, undermining municipalities that were trying to have a stronger pandemic response. The situation in the state's nursing homes and mental health facilities has been a disaster, and he has refused to do anything to head off outbreaks in our prison system. Our state has been near the top in terms of cases and deaths. We should have acted faster.

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.).**

SO: I believe that housing policy should go hand-in-hand with environmental policy. That means making sure people can live near transit nodes or job centers. I believe that vibrant neighborhoods should be able to provide housing options for people of all income levels.

- 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?**

SO: YES.

A local-option real estate transfer fee should be part of a solution that would also include an increase to the deeds excise tax. These are not mutually exclusive and should be considered as part of a comprehensive way to raise revenue to support 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?**

SO: YES.

I support giving communities more tools to help people stay in their homes and neighborhoods. Rent relief to tenants and mortgage relief to small landlords should be part of a coronavirus recovery package. Protections for renters should be extended so that renters are not faced with many months of back-payment expected once the economic situation improves.

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?**

SO: YES.

I believe that we should be encouraging density that is reasonable walking distance to transit. This would discourage daily car commuting.

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?**

SO: YES.

One eviction is sometimes enough to trap people in a downward spiral where an unstable housing situation leads to a loss of income, which leads to more housing instability or even homelessness. Sealing eviction records can give people a lifeline out.

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.

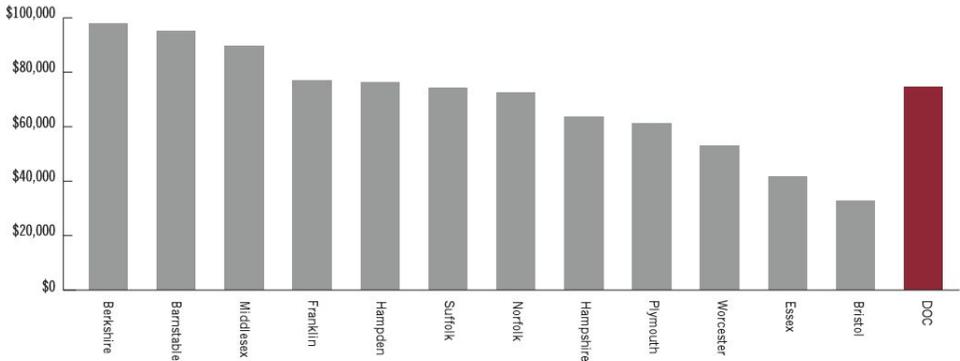
Immigrants make up 16% of Massachusetts’s population; however, demagoguery against, or indifference to, immigrant populations has historically been a mainstay of Massachusetts politics. As the Trump administration in Washington ramps up a xenophobic mass deportation agenda, it is important for states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

SO: I believe that all people should be treated with dignity and respect. I've worked with & supported local activists in Progressive Watertown who were committed to last session's criminal justice reform bill. I helped sponsor local forums for voters to learn more from criminal justice advocates.

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

SO: YES.

- 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?

SO: All mandatory minimums should be eliminated. The age of criminal majority should be raised. I support so-called "Romeo & Juliet" exceptions that do not criminalize consensual relations between two teens close in age. There is no reason to bring them into the criminal justice system.

- 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?**

SO: 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?**

SO: YES.

These restrictions are a huge obstacle that prevent even family members from visiting inmates. Anecdotal evidence shows that these restrictions did not reduce the amount of contraband entering prisons.

- 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?**

SO: YES.

Inmates should not be treated as a profit center for prisons or for private companies. Prisons should not be gouging their inmates on phone calls or basic health & hygiene necessities.

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?**

SO: 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?**

SO: YES.

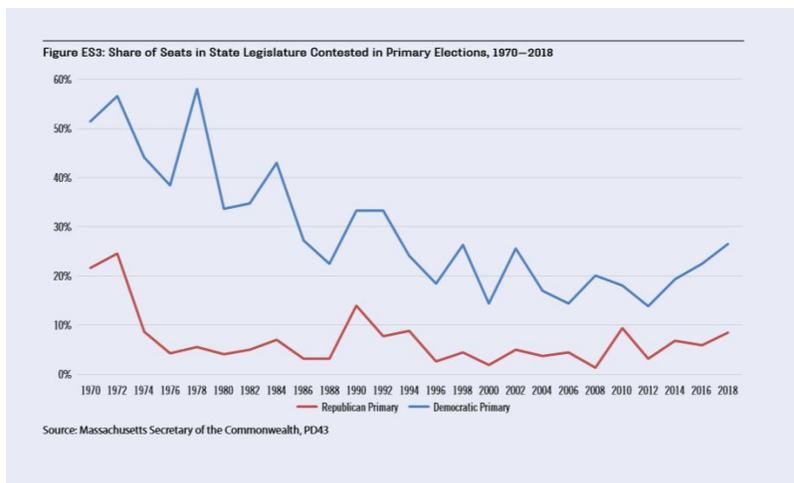
This is an important measure to make sure that all drivers are trained and insured. It is necessary for workers to get to their jobs and it is a public safety issue for all of us that are on the commonwealth's roads.

G. Good Government and Strong Democracy

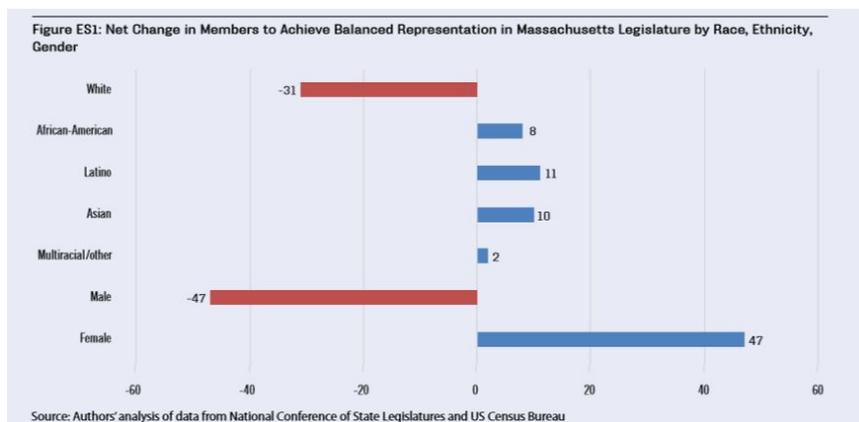
A strong democracy depends on a transparent and representative government and an engaged public. Too often, however, we see centralized, unaccountable power and barriers to participation. An undemocratic, centralized power structure on Beacon Hill makes it easier for lobbyists to target the top and undermine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

SO: I believe in transparency in government. Legislators should be held accountable for their decisions by voters, and that cannot happen if those decisions are made in the dark. As a constituent, I have supported Representative Hecht's push for more transparency in the House. I believe in expanding voter access to the ballot -- in my position as a Democratic Party official, I organized the push on the DSC Rules committee to have same-day voter registration for the annual Democratic Party Caucuses.

- 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?**

SO: 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...?**

- 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?

- 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?

- 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?**

SO: YES.

Workplace and sexual harassment have no place in the legislature. Incidents should be investigated by a mechanism outside of the State House power structure.

- 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?**

SO: YES.

Removing the burden of fundraising from candidates and elected officials would free up time for them to work on legislation or just interact with the voters in their communities. The current public campaign finance law in MA is inadequate.

- 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?**

SO: YES.

As a working parent I know that child care is essential. The FEC has ruled that these expenses

are generally allowed and therefore there's no reason that OCPF should not consider them legitimate as well.

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)?

SO: The pandemic has shown us how important it is to have full vote-by-mail options.

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

SO: YES.

Yes, I also worked to collect signatures for this ballot initiative and the Watertown DTC endorsed it when I was the chair.

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?

SO: YES.

Anything that gives people more confidence that their elections are fairly and accurately conducted is positive. Massachusetts should continue to have fully verifiable elections with paper ballots.

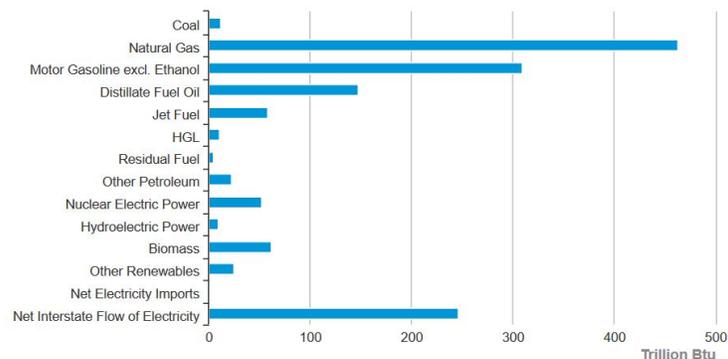
H. Sustainable Infrastructure and Environmental Protection

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.

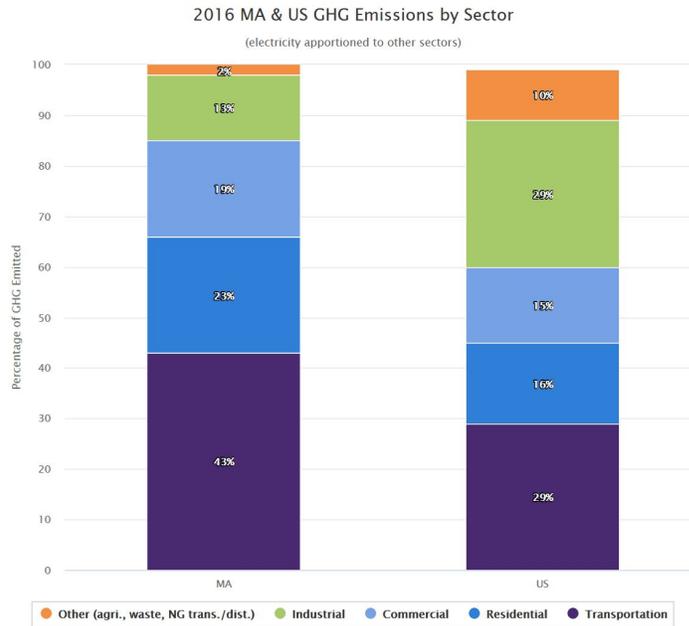
Despite recent progress, Massachusetts is still overwhelmingly dependent on fossil fuels.

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.).**

SO: I believe that every action the state takes should be viewed from a lens of climate change and resiliency. We should be cognizant of the impact each change in policy might have on carbon pollution. As a professional transportation consultant, I bring almost 20 years of experience in helping states plan for infrastructure improvements and anticipating logistics and supply chain needs of local industry. Shortening supply chains is good for both the local economy and the environment.

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

SO: YES.

Both Watertown and Cambridge already have those bans and I believe it works quite well. The number of plastic bags in the environment has decreased while the ban was in place and I've only noticed bag litter return during the time now when the ban was lifted due to the pandemic.

- 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?**

SO: YES.

The cap on net-metering is inhibiting the growth of solar energy in Massachusetts. It should be

raised and the state should provide more information to the public so that they can make informed decisions around solar.

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

SO: 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?**

SO: YES.

Environmental Justice must also be a part of any coronavirus economic recovery plan. For too long frontline communities like Chelsea have been used as literal and figurative dumping grounds. Residents were breathing bad air even before COVID-19. Getting the city back to "normal" is not good enough.

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

SO: YES.

Leaks from gas pipelines are a major contributor to climate change. Expanding natural gas is a source of methane and only delays our needed transition to all-renewables.

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?**

SO: 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?**

SO: YES.

The MBTA is spending a billion dollars on a new fare collection system. That is money that could be spent on improving T infrastructure instead. I believe that the MBTA should move quickly to make buses fare free and look into moving that way for the entire system. The commuter rail should also change its fare structure so that low-income people can afford it as a commuting option. Raising MBTA fares runs counter to the policy goal of reducing the amount of carbon emissions caused by transportation.

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?**

SO: YES.

Regional ballot initiatives are a good way to make sure that the people who are directly impacted are the ones making the decisions.

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.

SO: Now more than ever it's important to have strong advocates for progressive values in the state legislature. Massachusetts should be leading the way on progressive policies and a progressive response to the coronavirus pandemic. We should be making sure frontline essential workers get PPE and hazard pay. We should be pushing for expanded vote-by-mail so citizens don't have to choose between their health and their right to vote. We need to make sure that as we start to come out of this emergency, people aren't hit with unaffordable rental, utility or medical bills. Before the crisis, Massachusetts had the highest child care costs in the nation; we can't expect parents to get back to work if affordable care is not available.