



**PROGRESSIVE MASSACHUSETTS
2020 LEGISLATIVE
ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Date: 5/1/2020

Candidate: Melissa Smith

Office Sought: State Representative, 4th Norfolk

Party: Democratic

Website: www.votemelissasmith.com

Twitter: @votemelissasm

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

Instagram: votemelissasmith

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?

MS: I'm running because the South Shore deserves a representative who is an active member of the community. I want to pass Safe Communities, Healthy Youth, and Roe as fast as I can. Medicare-for-All may be moving to the top position though, because I think there may be real opportunity to move on that sooner than expected. I'm also keen to wrangle climate change, transportation, and criminal justice reform.

2. What prepares you to serve in this capacity?

MS: I've been following the legislature closely for the past few years. Before that, I had a solid career in market research, primarily directing qualitative projects about consumer behavior, where it was my job to uncover shopper or user motivation and identify messaging and product opportunities for retail, manufacturing, or service/utility clients. I think that experience talking to people and learning from them will make me the kind of state rep I think we need, one who brings people to the state house to find solutions to our most pressing challenges. I also really care about people and want to help.

It's important to me to use this platform to educate people about what's going on at the state house, to help them understand how what happens there affects them, and to improve the function of our state government by bringing more people to the process. I've been doing that as an organizer for the past few years, and I expect that the kinds of events and actions I've organized in the past will continue.

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

MS: Legislator fear of voters. Many reps I've talked to seem to be terrified of interaction with voters. Safe Communities, for instance, gives them nightmares. One actually told me that supporting it is "political suicide." I think that's nonsense. Talking to people about complicated issues can be hard, but I think laying out the facts and your opinions openly builds trust. I've written op-eds and testified at the statehouse in favor of it and it's led to a lot of very positive conversations.

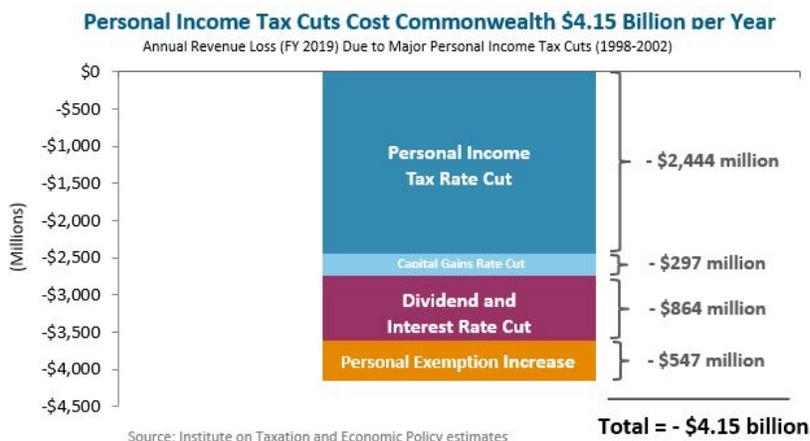
There's also money and the general perception that progressive legislation = higher taxes. I think we can counter that impression with transparency and messaging which reflects the benefits. Last year, Hingham bought the privately-owned water company with a 70% of the vote at Town Meeting. For years, people predicted that Hingham would never be able to get that done, but it happened because of lots of conversations, lots of well-laid out plans, lots of formal and informal meetings with voters, and messaging which emphasized the long-term community benefits.

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.

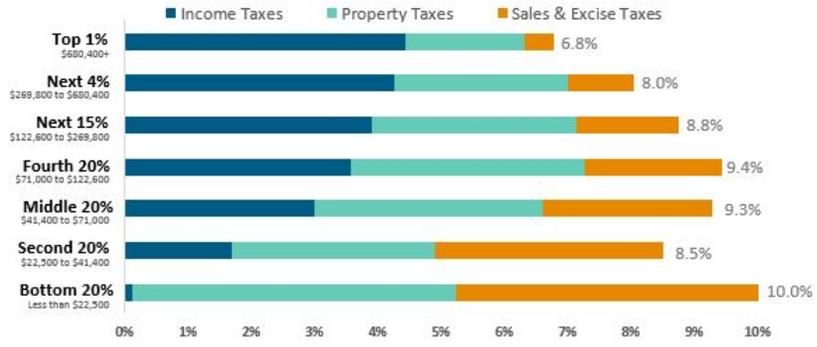
Declining revenues have meant drastic cuts, limiting our ability to invest in our communities and future economic stability.



Massachusetts state and local taxes are regressive.

Highest Income Taxpayers Pay Smaller Share of Income in State and Local Taxes

% of personal income paid in state and local taxes, 2018 projection



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.).**

MS: Government is how we take care of each other, and that costs money. Informally and as part of this campaign, I've had a lot of conversations with people about revenue-increasing proposals like taxing private university endowments and the millionaires tax. I'm in favor of both and I've started to see increased openness to these ideas just in the past few months. Over the next year or so, I think progressives will have a powerful opportunity to make the case that a strong safety net, reliable infrastructure, single-payer healthcare will not only be beneficial day-to-day, but also help us prepare for and manage catastrophes like the one we're currently experiencing.

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?

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")?

MS: 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?
 - 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?

B. Jobs and the Economy

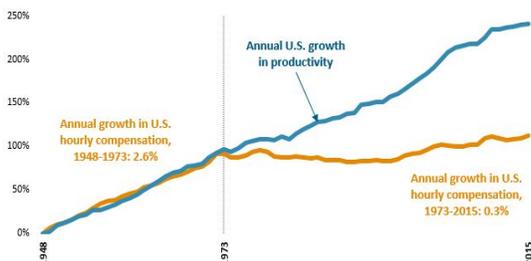
Massachusetts ranks as one of the top ten [most unequal states](#), as the gains from economic growth have disproportionately benefited the already well-off. Compounding this, we are one of the most expensive states in the country for [health care](#), [housing](#), and [child care](#), all of which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

MS: Informally and as part of this campaign, I've talked a lot about raising wages and shifting the burden of healthcare from employers to the gov.. I think we should be ashamed that anyone can work full time and not be able to afford living space that meets their needs. I think we should have policies which disfavor companies which don't pay a living wage or try to roll full or part time employees into contractor relationships in order to avoid paying for benefits. I think this crisis has brought low-wage retail jobs into the spotlight in a way that really will help bring the public around to this point of view. I think businesses and the government would be much more open to pro-worker wage legislation if we passed Medicare-for-All at the same time.

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

MS: 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?**

MS: 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?**

MS: 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?**

MS: 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?**

MS: 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?**

MS: YES.

C. Education

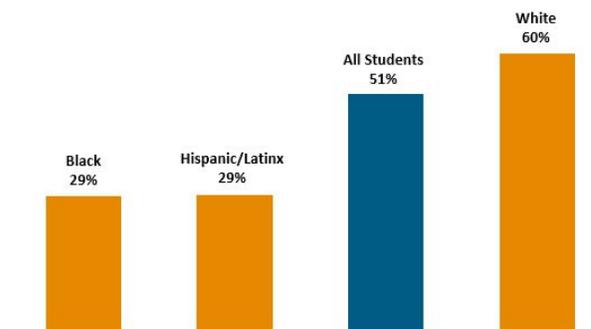
The promise of public education has always been as a gateway to opportunity and mobility for all, regardless of economic circumstances, a cornerstone of the American dream for all residents. Although our public education system gets high marks overall, it remains one of the [most unequal](#) in the country.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

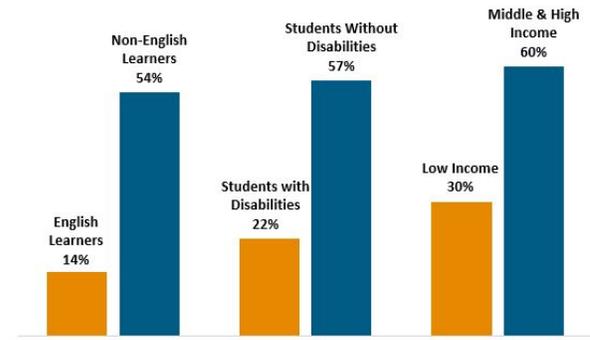
Share of MA 4th Graders Proficient on the 2017 NAEP Reading Exam, by Student Race, all students



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

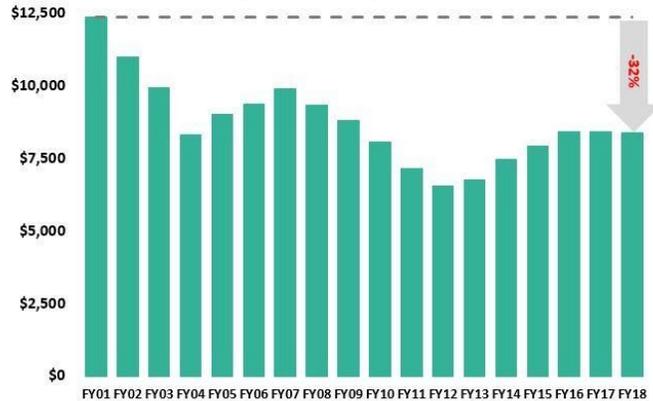


Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2017

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.

- 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.).**

MS: College and trade school should be available and accessible to anyone who wants to go and the cost are now ridiculous. I regard interest in student loans to be a tax on not having wealthy parents, and I believe that if we prohibited or capped interest rates for students in MA, we could drive unscrupulous lenders out of the marketplace, and make it possible for students to actually pay down loans once they've finished school. I also support total loan forgiveness, and I would support partial versions, like forgiveness for public service, economic hardship, etc. The cost of post-hs ed has to come down, but I don't want that to happen at the expense of teachers or support staff. I have far too many friends barely making ends meet and adjuncts, or racing from school to school to cobble together a living. I'd support policies which disfavor schools which rely too heavily on adjuncts or other part-time faculty who don't get benefits, which don't fully fund (i.e., stipend includes enough for actual housing, food, healthcare, and the occasional recreational activity) graduate students. Taking ever-increasing healthcare costs out of schools budgets by paying single-payer would help.

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

MS: YES.

So much. Also we need free full-day K in every town.

- 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?**

MS: Medicare-For-All would be my first choice, saving school systems money year over year. Insurance is important, and it is killing school systems with increasing costs. Millionaires tax and taxing endowments would also help.

- 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.)**

MS: 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.**

MS: I'd also suggest more disclosure from both.

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?

MS: YES.

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

MS: YES.

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

MS: YES.

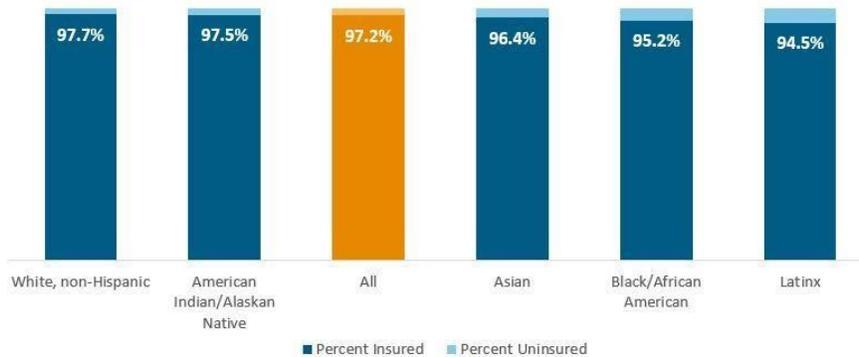
D. Health Care

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

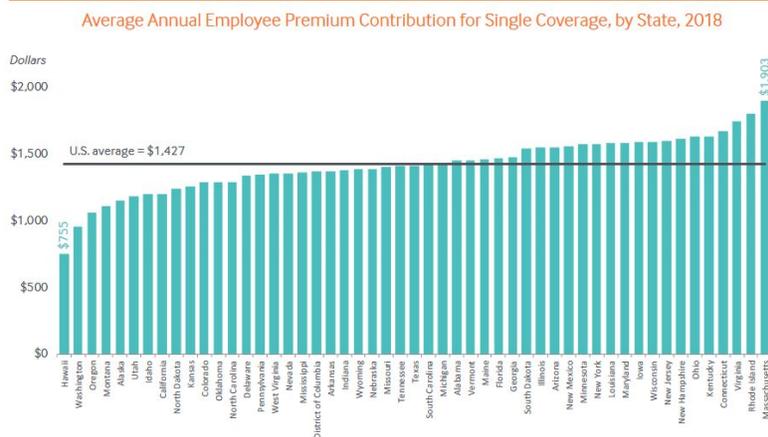
Percent with health insurance in Massachusetts, by race, 2017.



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.).**

MS: I support single-payer healthcare. I ran physician Katie McBrine's state senate campaign in 2018 and this was our core issue. Informally and as okay if this campaign, I've talked a lot with a lot of people, including business owners, about how a single-payer system would be fairer, more just, and economically beneficial. I think the current moment provides a strong opportunity to make this case, because people recognize that underinsured and uninsured folks won't get tested for Covid-19 and that means health risks for everyone.

Roe: <https://votemelissasmith.com/2019/10/04/i-support-the-roe-act/>

Healthy Youth:

<https://hinghamanchor.com/opinion-its-long-past-time-we-taught-our-kids-the-facts-of-life/>

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

MS: 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?**

MS: 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?**

MS: YES.

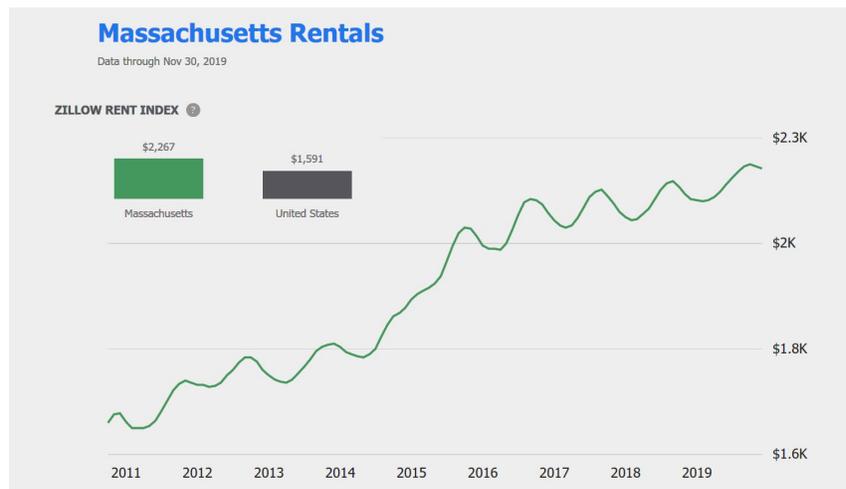
5. **Pandemic Response. How would you evaluate the state's response to the Covid-19 pandemic?**

MS: Not great. We waited too long to ask people to stay home and we aren't doing enough to protect people from economic devastation. It's embarrassing given our advantages.

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.).**

MS: I don't at all understand why we don't have rent control in MA, I don't understand why towns are allowed to (basically) prohibit multi-family housing, and I can't see how we can expect to keep having services provided by low-wage workers who can't afford to live anywhere. Improving wages at the low end would do a lot to mitigate this problem, as would a greater state investment in water and sewer management. Part of the pushback on multi-family dwellings on the south shore is that towns don't have enough water to accommodate so many residences. If the state supported MWRA hookups by facilitating intertown negotiations and subsidizing infrastructure, we'd start to get somewhere. School system capacity is also always a talking point, but I think the state could step in here as well. And improving transportation would go a long way to making it possible for people to move to more affordable locations. So too, encouraging economic investment in satellite hubs.

- 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?**

MS: 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?

MS: 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?

MS: 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?

MS: 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.

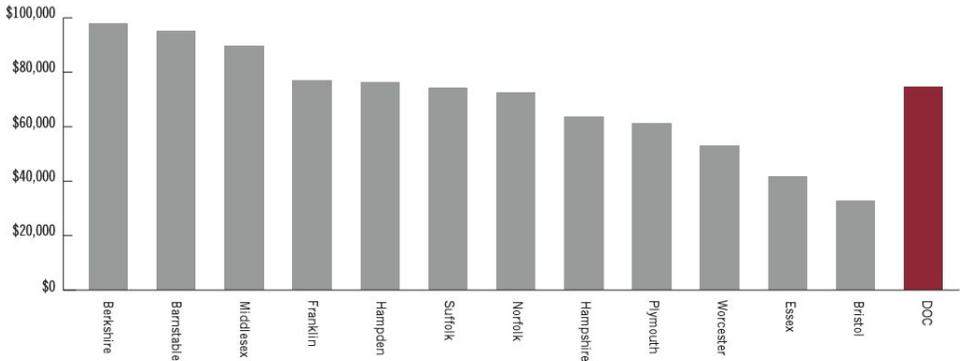
Immigrants make up 16% of Massachusetts’s population; however, demagoguery against, or indifference to, immigrant populations has historically been a mainstay of Massachusetts politics. As the Trump administration in Washington ramps up a xenophobic mass deportation agenda, it is important for states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

MS: Safe Communities, also testified at the statehouse hearing in January:
<https://hinghamanchor.com/opinion-safe-communities-act/>

I come from the chain gang state of Georgia and I would very much like to see all prison populations reduced. Prisons and jails should hold violent, dangerous criminals only, and I believe that for many crimes, restorative justice holds an answer. I believe we should eliminate cash, all mandatory minimums, and build strong social safety nets which include the families of incarcerated and jailed people, regardless of the crime.

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

MS: 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?**

- 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?**

MS: YES.

Solitary confinement should be limited to 15 days for all incarcerated people. For those diagnosed with mental health issues, this practice should be prohibited. Instead, they should be placed in secure treatment centers or watch units. People with mental health issues need more socialization, visitation, and services. Placing them in isolation would only serve to worsen their condition and prolong their recovery.

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?**

MS: 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?**

MS: 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?

MS: 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?

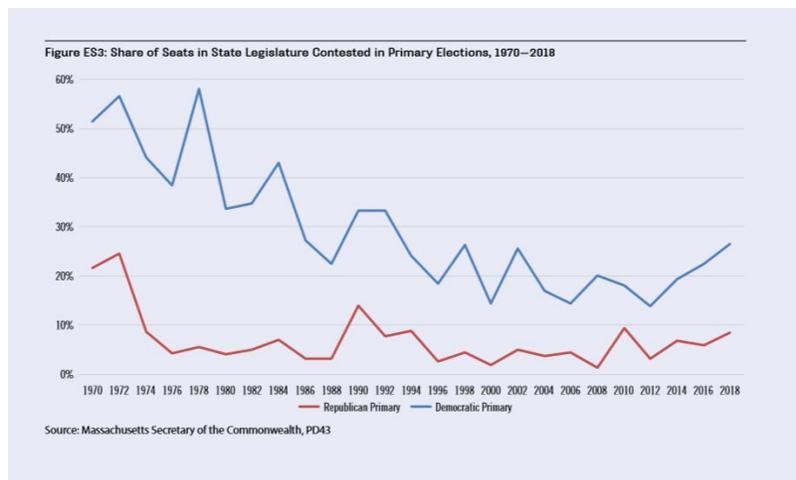
MS: YES.

G. Good Government and Strong Democracy

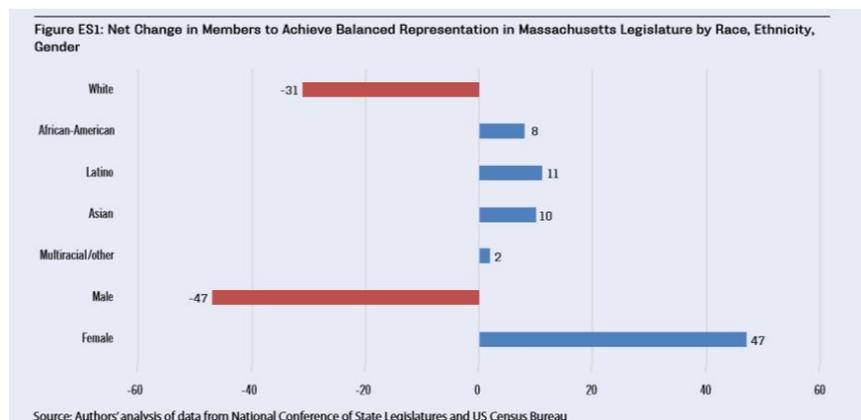
A strong democracy depends on a transparent and representative government and an engaged public. Too often, however, we see centralized, unaccountable power and barriers to participation. An undemocratic, centralized power structure on Beacon Hill makes it easier for lobbyists to target the top and undermine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

MS: I support public financing of campaigns and requiring the state house to record and publish committee and floor votes. I'd go so far as requiring officials to record and publish their call and email records, including the general content of the calls and emails. I think the state should assist officials, towns, and cities in maintain up-to-date, ADA compliant websites and social media channels.

Transparency: <https://votemelissasmith.com/2019/10/03/transparency-in-government/>

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?**

MS: 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?**

MS: YES.

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?**

MS: 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?**

MS: YES.

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?

MS: 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?

MS: YES.

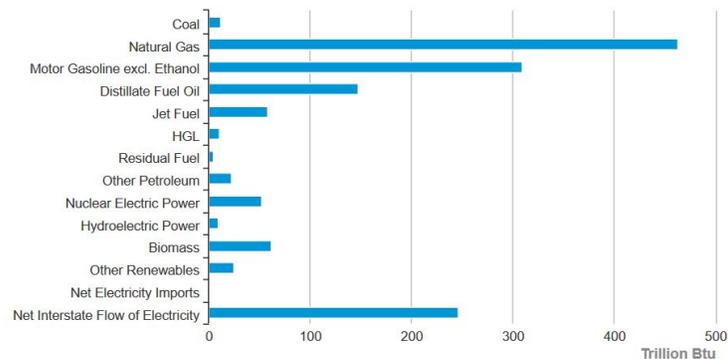
H. Sustainable Infrastructure and Environmental Protection

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.

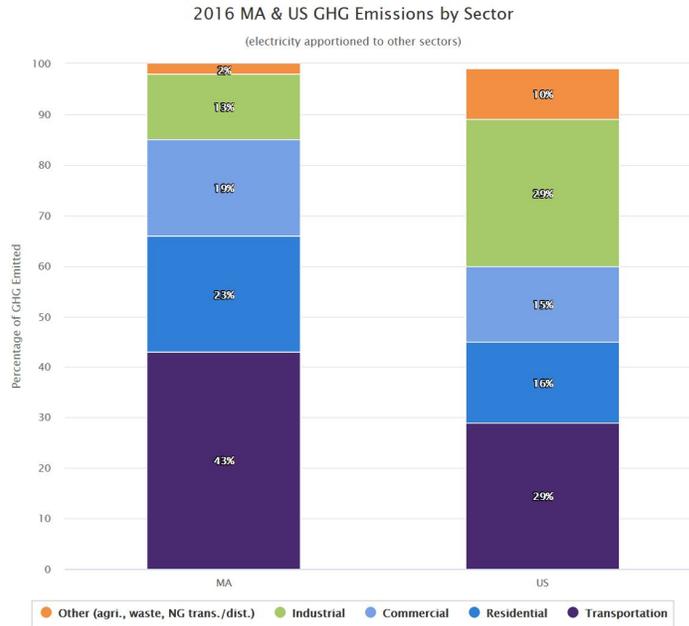
Despite recent progress, Massachusetts is still overwhelmingly dependent on fossil fuels.

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.).**

MS: Investment in public transportation is critical for the future. Privatizing any party of public transport undermines its value as a public good, and I'd support buying back rail and ferry systems. I'm also for protecting the shoreline and installing air quality monitoring stations all over the Commonwealth. Of particular concern in my area is the proposed compressor station in Weymouth which will add a lot of pollutants to an area already saturated with pollutants and provide no value.

Testimony at the state house about the bed for an air quality monitoring station in the Fore River Basin:
<https://votemelissasmith.com/2019/10/04/what-i-said-on-beacon-hill-re-air-quality-monitoring-station-approximately/>

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

MS: YES.

I supported this in Hingham, and it passed.

- 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?**

MS: YES.

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

MS: 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?

MS: YES.

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

MS: 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?

MS: 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?

MS: 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?

MS: 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.

MS: Melissa Smith is a lifelong Democrat who grew up in Georgia. Melissa and her husband moved to Hingham in 2008, and welcomed their son in 2011. In the run up to the 2016 presidential election, Melissa realized that MA is stuck in a rut, and decided to leave her career as a retail consultant and push for change.

Highlights

Town-appointed member of the Hingham Water Supply Committee since 2016

Hingham Democratic Town Committee Member since 2017, State Convention Delegate 17-19, Parade Chair 18-19

South Shore Action Steering Committee Member since 2017

Mass Women's Political Caucus South Shore Vice-Chair since 2019

Col. Lothrop Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution Member since 2018,

Constitution Week and Communications Chair 2019

Campaign manager to the Dr. Katie McBrine for State Senate campaign, 2018, and advisor to many other South Shore campaigns in the year since

PhD in English

Former Shopper Marketing and Consumer Insights Consultant.

For more of Melissa's resume, see LinkedIn: Melissa Smith is a lifelong Democrat who grew up in Georgia. Melissa and her husband moved to Hingham in 2008, and welcomed their son in 2011. In

the run up to the 2016 presidential election, Melissa realized that MA is stuck in a rut, and decided to leave her career as a retail consultant and push for change. Highlights Town-appointed member of the Hingham Water Supply Committee since 2016 Hingham Democratic Town Committee Member since 2017, State Convention Delegate 17-19, Parade Chair 18-19 South Shore Action Steering Committee Member since 2017 Mass Women's Political Caucus South Shore Vice-Chair since 2019 Col. Lothrop Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution Member since 2018, Constitution Week and Communications Chair 2019 Campaign manager to the Dr. Katie McBrine for State Senate campaign, 2018, and advisor to many other South Shore campaigns in the year since PhD in English Former Shopper Marketing and Consumer Insights Consultant. For more of Melissa's resume, see LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/melissabsmith/>