

Background and Priorities

0. Please tell us anything you would like us to know about you including your motivation, preparation, priorities, and vision for the campaign and office.

A longtime Hillside resident, I have worked as a community activist for more than a decade on a range of local issues. As a board member of Citizens for Public Schools and through my service on the 2010-2011 Medford School Committee, I have been a vocal proponent of increasing state education funding, differentiating classroom curricula, and keeping the school libraries open. A biologist by training, I worked as the Supervisor for the Freshman Biology Labs at Northeastern University and later for the Sustainable Business Network of Massachusetts which supports small businesses to become more “green” and encourages local shopping within a community. As President of Friends of the Medford Public Library, I have led fundraising efforts to support library programs and advocated for increased library funding at the city and state levels. I have also been involved in local efforts to advocate for street trees and clean up of the Mystic River and the Middlesex Fells.

Through my work in the community, I've heard directly from citizens and business owners about their concerns, and understand the legislation that impacts them. I've also built solid relationships with local officials to effect change. I'm eager to bring this knowledge to the state level to help shape policy and effect positive changes for our community.

There are many issues that I am eager to start work on. My highest priorities are public education, environmental issues, and the growing economic inequality.

Transportation and Infrastructure

1. Former Rep. Carl Sciortino was a leading advocate for public transit and a champion for the Green Line Extension project, in particular.

What kinds of legislative efforts would you undertake to put the MBTA on more stable financial footing?

What would you do to keep the Green Line Extension project moving forward?

How far should the Green Line be extended (and why)?

One of the biggest issues with the MBTA's finances is its debt load and a large part of its budget goes to servicing this debt. The debt in part is from state obligations to expand public transportation to mitigate increased air pollution from the Big Dig, while much of the rest was to take care of a backlog of maintenance issues. The Commonwealth should assume at least part of this debt freeing up money that the MBTA can use for operating costs and maintenance. Possible new sources of revenue include restructuring fees in a way that would not impact ridership or a universal pass system that is paid for by employers or developers.

The Green line should be extended all the way to Rte. 16 (Mystic Valley Parkway). A terminus at Rte. 16 would be convenient to existing bus lines and to the multi-purpose

planned paths for pedestrians and bicycles. Thousands of additional riders would have access within a 10-minute walk. It is also a matter of equity as a Rte.16 terminus would serve two Environmental Justice communities in West Medford and Northwest Somerville.

The State has continually delayed the green line extension and pressure needs to be applied to keep the extension on its current schedule. Additionally, spending has only been approved to a College Ave terminus. I will work to secure the funding needed to extend the Green Line all the way to a terminus at Rte.16.

Infrastructure maintenance backlog

2. Numerous studies have reported on the backlog of maintenance of the Commonwealth's roads, dams, transit systems, pipelines, along with increased demand for bicycle and pedestrian right-of-ways.

What would be your priorities?

How would you pay for infrastructure improvements?

My priorities would be to expand public transportation as well as making our urban areas safer for pedestrians and bicycles. Providing safe routes would encourage more people to ride bicycles or walk to their destinations.

At the same time there are dams and bridges that are in urgent need of repair to prevent them from failing. So priority should be given to those structures in critical condition. At the same time we need to be thinking long-term and make needed adaptations for sea level rise due to climate change. Structures such as the Amelia Earhart Dam will need to be able handle storm surges to prevent upstream flooding.

Then we work on improving our roadways and other less urgently needed infrastructure. Again taking a long-term view, we need to provide sufficient funding for regular maintenance of the state's infrastructure.

Beyond Federal funding and low-interest loans, new dedicated revenue streams need to be explored. We need to keep the gas tax indexed to inflation intact. Other new revenue streams we should explore could include expanding toll ways and toll bridges as long as they are equitably distributed in the state, a vehicle miles travelled tax, and collecting annual payments from large corporate businesses specifically for infrastructure needs.

Taxation and Revenue

3. Rep. Sciortino was a dedicated advocate for fair taxation policy. What changes in Massachusetts tax policy would you advocate? Please be specific about what taxes (and tax expenditures) you would change and how.

I have greatly admired Carl Sciortino for his work to close corporate tax loopholes in a climate that favors big business. The state largely depends on taxes paid by individual citizens – most of whom are far from wealthy. Large corporations operating in Massachusetts find legal loopholes to reduce their taxes to our state and often take their profits elsewhere. Despite the difficulty of doing so, Carl was able to close a number of these loopholes. I will continue his work in this area and work toward a progressive income tax in Massachusetts to distribute the tax burden more equitably.

One of the major issues in our state budget is decreasing revenues and the consequent increased burden imposed on low and middle income families. Our wealthiest citizens and large corporations need to take on their fair share of taxes and the burden of supporting our state needs to be removed from our lower income families. I will work to find new revenue streams and to increase some current sources by changing our tax structure to become more progressive and reducing reliance on regressive taxes.

Our overall tax structure needs to be reformed. Changing to a graduated income tax would take a constitutional amendment, which would be difficult to pass. Another option is to pass legislation to increase the tax rate while increasing deductions and exemptions, I would work to close remaining corporate tax loopholes and push to examine corporate subsidies to determine their efficacy and make sure that promises are kept.

Veterans

4. There is nationwide concern about the adequacy of efforts to link veterans with the benefits, job training, and health and mental health care they need. What would you do to ensure that veterans get the full range of help they deserve?

The state programs through the Office of Veteran Services need to be sufficiently funded in order to offer timely, quality services.

Massachusetts VA hospitals are doing well compared to the rest of the country, boasting three of the nation's highest-rated VA hospitals. However, this high performance is not consistent throughout the state, with waiting times in some VA hospitals unacceptably long. We need to bring all state VA hospitals and clinics up to the same high standard.

We should increase outreach efforts by state and municipal Veteran Service Offices to ensure that veterans are fully informed about resources that are available.

Civil and Voting Rights

5. Rep. Sciortino was known for his civil rights advocacy on behalf of members of the GLBTQ community. What are some of the ongoing civil rights issues that you would use a seat in the House to address?

I strongly believe that everyone deserves the same civil rights for all and will fight discrimination. I have shown this to be true by my past actions with respect to LGBT issues. Although I have

not personally experienced overt discrimination, as a woman and an ethnic Jew, I have experienced implicit discrimination particularly in academia. I worked to ensure the civil right of same-sex couples to marry and have stood up for the rights of transgender people at the municipal level.

Carl Sciortino was instrumental in passing An Act Relative to Gender Identity which protects transgender people from discrimination in employment, housing, credit, and education. However, the right of transgender people to not be discriminated against in public accommodations was not part of this Act. I would support legislation such as S.643/H.1589 An Act Relative to Equal Access to prohibit discrimination in places of public accommodation.

6. Although immigration reform is largely a federal issue, states can pass laws and implement policies which afford immigrants' rights and protections, regardless of their documentation status.

What should Massachusetts policy towards undocumented immigrants be with respect to: issuing driver's licenses, accessing in-state tuition rates in state colleges and universities, accessing state-funded housing subsidies, health coverage, and the protections afforded to citizens and documented workers?

Every person residing in Massachusetts deserves proper housing, health-care and other basic protections provided by the state. Allowing undocumented immigrants to hold driver's licenses without consequences due to their immigration status can ensure that they are safe drivers. Massachusetts can choose to grant state citizenship to non-citizens (both documented and undocumented) that would confer rights within the state.

An example of such legislation that should be explored is New York State's "New York is Home Act." This legislation would allow immigrants to qualify for Medicaid, obtain professional licenses, tuition assistance, driver's licenses and grant state and local voting rights.

Criminal Justice

7. What kinds of reforms would you advocate for in the Massachusetts criminal justice and corrections systems, and why?

Our first priority should be to keep non-violent offenders out of prison. We need to increase funding for programs such as access to quality mental health and substance abuse services. By keeping non-violent offenders out of prison the probability of re-offending decreases, saving the state money in the long term.

We need to investment in expanding and improving re-entry/re-integration programs such as education and job training supervision and support services for prisoners after release.

Mandatory sentencing for non-violent offenders should also be reexamined. This approach puts non-violent offenders in prison when other programs outside prison would be a better solution.

Also, we need to interrupt the “school-to-prison pipeline.” Expulsion due to the zero tolerance policy for minor offenses by already struggling students not only demoralizes students but leaves them on the streets unsupervised. The goal should be to keep them in school rather than interrupting their education.

I will support legislation such as S.268 Act for Interrupting School to Prison Pipeline championed by Bill Robinson, Director of the Education Committee of NECAACP (the New England Conference of NAACP).

Gambling

8. Please explain your position on the ballot initiative to repeal the Massachusetts Expanded Gaming Act. If casino gambling moves forward, what legislative or advocacy efforts would you undertake to improve the law and/or to protect Somerville and Medford residents and businesses from the adverse impacts of a casino in Everett or Revere?

I am very much FOR the ballot initiative to repeal the Massachusetts Expanded Gaming Act. Although many see casinos as a new source of state revenue and jobs, I believe that societal costs associated with casinos far outweigh any benefits. Studies have shown that there is an increase in social issues within a 50 mile radius of a new casino such as alcohol and substance abuse, gambling addictions, bankruptcy, crime, and suicides. Any additional revenue to the state from a casino will be reduced by the increased costs associated with these problems.

I am also concerned about the negative impact of a casino complex on small local businesses and the drain of money from the local economy. Since those that can least afford it make up a disproportionate share of casino visitors, the money spent amounts to a regressive source of revenue.

Of particular concern to Medford and Somerville is the building of a casino in Everett or Revere. The inevitable increase in traffic particularly on Route 16 and through Wellington Circle would have a very tangible negative impact on Medford and Somerville. Not only would traffic congestion increase but health issues due to increased vehicle emissions would likely increase or be exacerbated in an area that already has a very high incidence of asthma and other illnesses.

Health Care

9. Although Massachusetts was a pioneer in health insurance reform, many challenges remain.

What are some of the most pressing issues in health care coverage, access, and financing, and what can the state do to address those challenges?

Should implementing a single payer system be part of the solution? If so, what should be the roles of the state and private insurers in that system?

Some of the most pressing issues in health care include costs, lack of dental and vision care, inadequate mental health and substance abuse care, and a focus on cost-centered care rather than patient-centered care. The state should pass legislation, such as that sponsored by Rep. Sciortino and Senator Jehlen, which would remove barriers to cost-effective care. The state should also invest in and cover dental, vision, mental health, and substance abuse care. A single payer system should absolutely be part of the solution, in the style of "Medicare for All," where the state would take on most people's insurance costs entirely, with private insurers able to cover add-ons for people who wanted extra coverage. In implementing single-payer, we should convene panels to examine how best to shift to patient-centered, rather than cost-centered care. Additionally, single-payer would help to reduce costs by cutting down on administration and by a large single pool of insured people.

10. Reproductive rights are being threatened across the country. What are the most significant challenges to protecting reproductive rights in Massachusetts and what would you do to address those challenges?

As a woman who grew up in the 1970s, I have always been a staunch supporter of protecting reproductive and health rights.

The right of patients and staff to enter clinics where abortions are performed without harassment or violence has been threatened by the recent Supreme Court decision striking down the 35-foot buffer zone around such Massachusetts clinics. I will champion legislation that will ensure patient and staff protection.

In Massachusetts, women under the age of 18 must obtain consent from a parent or legal guardian (ironically, the age of consent to engage in sex is 16). There are a number of reasons why obtaining a parent's consent is not always feasible. I will support legislation such as An Act Relative to Responsible Counseling and Act Relative to Consent and Counseling for Certain Minors.

Sex education in our schools needs to be age-appropriate and medically accurate. I support An Act Relative to Healthy Youth that would ensure teaching of medically-accurate information about abstinence and contraception. It is important that our children have the information they need to prevent unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Education

11. What is the appropriate role for standardized testing in elementary and secondary education? How should student, teacher, and school performance be assessed?

The appropriate role for standardized testing in school is to aid student assessment by the classroom teacher. This would allow teachers to adjust their teaching to the needs of the students both as a group and individually. Some standardized tests that are used to assess students state-wide, nationally, or internationally are also appropriate as long as there is no time spent learning the test.

The use of students' standardized test score is NOT appropriate to evaluate students, teachers, or schools when those scores carry consequences for each. There are many problems with high-stakes standardized testing starting with what the tests actually measure. We want our students to learn how to think critically, be creative, and be able to work in a team. Standardized tests can never measure this. At best they measure getting the right answer in math or the right answer according to the test makers in ELA. Statistical analysis of these scores is questionable.

Standardized tests are the educational analog to the old joke about looking for your lost keys under the street lamp. They measure only what is easy to measure and purport to be scientific because they result in a number.

Students are more appropriately evaluated by those that know them best. The classroom teacher is an educated professional and works with her/his students on a daily basis. The teacher is best equipped to design appropriate evaluations. Students should be evaluated in multiple ways that allow them to demonstrate their knowledge and creativity.

Teachers are best evaluated by their administrators. Appropriate assessment tools that include observations by building administrators, district-level administrators, and perhaps more senior teachers would be appropriate. There should be a clear understanding of the district's goals for their students and what it means for a teacher to reach those goals.

Schools can be evaluated by district administrators but the assessment tool but multiple measures need to be employed.

12. What are the appropriate roles and financing mechanisms for charter schools and public schools (including pilot schools)? How, if at all, should student selection and retention policies and practices impact public financing?

Every child learns differently. There is not one school that can be a good fit for all students. Parents need to find the school that best fits their own child. Charter schools can offer them an option over the traditional public school.

One of the big controversies with charter schools in Massachusetts is the way they are funded. Charters receive tuition from the sending district, diverting much needed funds from district schools. There is a formula the state uses to reimburse the district for the tuition but it does not fully cover the district's expense.

Charter schools are public schools and as such are subject to the same regulations that traditional district schools must meet. The student population of a charter should reflect that of the region it draws its students from but often does not include the same proportion of low-income, non-English speakers, or special education students. Many students return to the district schools for various reasons, further changing the student population of charter schools.

There should be financial and other consequences for charters that have selective admittance practices and low retention rates.

Since charter schools are approved only by the state and not by the local districts, the state should be providing the funding instead of burdening local districts. At the very least, we should increase tuition reimbursement to the sending districts and lengthen the reimbursement period for as long as a student remains at the charter.

13. What can the Commonwealth do to help Massachusetts High School graduates complete the college education they start?

First, we need to make sure that higher education is affordable for all students. Across the country, tuition has increased drastically over the last few decades, causing student loan debt to skyrocket. Massachusetts has fallen short of providing adequate funding for our state colleges and universities.

Second, the “high school diploma—college readiness gap” needs to be addressed. Colleges are finding that many high school graduates need remedial coursework in math and English before they are ready to matriculate. The wider this gap the less likely a student is to graduate from college.

Many high school graduates, despite not needing remedial courses, are still not prepared for college. They have not sufficiently developed critical thinking skills that cut across all subject areas.

We need to critically re-examine what and how we teach at the K-12 level. Despite over a decade of standards and testing, a large percentage of students are still not ready to succeed in college.

Once a student successfully matriculates into college, we need to provide whatever support may be needed to allow that student to finish. Support may include childcare, public transportation, or access to health care for the student and their family.

14. What can the Commonwealth do to strengthen early childhood programming and make it more affordable to residents?

The Commonwealth should institute Universal Pre-K and full-day Kindergarten. This would require appropriate funding so that the quality of early education would remain high. Many children from underprivileged areas do not receive the benefits of living in more advantaged families such as being read to, taken to museums, and private Pre-Kindergarten. The sooner these children can be enrolled in a high quality, affordable (or free) preschool, the easier it will be for them to build a strong educational base.

Housing and Homelessness

15. Greater Boston is facing an acute shortage of housing, and in particular, housing that is affordable to low and moderate income individuals and families. What steps would you advocate to address the shortage of housing? In your answer, please address the needs of individuals, families, renters, and buyers across income levels.

We need to increase direct public investment in affordable housing. We should also build additional and more creative public/private partnerships to create mixed-use housing such as lending programs and/or forgiveness of delinquent property tax to a new owner in exchange for developing affordable housing.

16. Family homelessness in Massachusetts has remained at unacceptably high levels, with 2,000 families in shelter and another 1,500 to 2,000 families being sheltered in motels. What would you do to address family homelessness?

It is clear that the best way to house homeless families is by sheltering them in homes in their own community. Housing families in motels miles from their own community is very expensive to the state.

Homeless students are transported back to their home community to allow them continuity in their education and stability in their relationships with friends and other community members. However, the cost of transporting students from distant shelters and motels is borne by the local school district. Housing families within their own communities would eliminate this transportation cost.

We should expand programs like the Massachusetts Rental Voucher program and subsidized housing so that no one is without a place to live in the Commonwealth.

Energy and the Environment

17. Metro Boston is uniquely vulnerable to climate change impacts, particularly sea level rise and flooding.

What should the Commonwealth do to enhance the safety and resiliency of our communities in the face of threats from climate change?

The Commonwealth must act to deal with the effects of climate change, particularly on our rivers and coasts. If we see rises as high as 12 feet, existing buildings, property, and infrastructure will be at risk. We should act to improve our coastline and waterways to protect against this, as well as ensuring that our infrastructure, such as bridges, roads, and rail lines, particularly subways, are protected against water threats. Boston's subway system is old and was not built with these problems in mind, so it is particularly vulnerable. If we do not take adequate steps to protect our transportation system, we will also have to deal with the economic effects of increased disruption for commuters, commercial transport. Taking preventative measures is a necessary and urgent action. As soon as possible, we should determine the nature of these preventative measures, whether levees and flood gates or ideally a more adaptable plan, such as proposed by the Boston Harbor Association. This would create "floodable" areas that would maintain water access for the city, but could disappear under flood conditions.

Flooding and water level rise are the greatest problems for the Mystic River area. The Amelia Earhart dam must be kept structurally sound and have adequate pumping capacity to prevent flooding upstream.

18. What are the most pressing concerns with respect to the Mystic River and its watershed, and what will you do as a legislator to address those concerns?

Major issues with respect to the Mystic River are:

- *Combined Sewer Overflows which lead to high bacterial counts in the river after heavy rain*
- *Runoff from streets which carries fertilizers, herbicides, oil, and salt into the river*
- *Invasive species which out-compete native species*

Aggressively growing water chestnut clogs the river making it next to impassable for boats. Other species like Phragmites and Japanese Knotweed colonize marshy land and river banks excluding native plants.

Funding for the planning and design stage of or the Mystic River Master Plan awaits Governor Patrick's approval. The plan includes restoration of river banks, protection of wildlife habitat, and multi-purpose paths along the river. I will work to secure the funding needed to implement this Master Plan.

19. What would be your top energy-related priorities?

I would focus on reducing our reliance on greenhouse gas producing energy sources and on expanding clean, sustainable energy alternatives. Also important is the reduction of overall energy usage, for example, by raising energy-efficiency standards for appliances and providing incentives for improving a home's energy efficiency and the installation of solar panels.

The Arts and Culture

20. What is the Commonwealth's role in promoting the arts and arts education, and how should it be funded?

The arts not only enrich our lives and our culture, they can also provide an economic driving force for a local community. The Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) provides funding which is distributed by local cultural councils and helps to incorporate the arts into the fabric of our community. Funding the MCC as fully as possible is important to allow artists, musicians, etc. to develop and share their creativity with local communities.

Arts education should be an important part of public education for many reasons. I have always advocated for a whole child approach to education which includes allowing a child to exercise its creative side. Every child's brain is different; some are more inclined to traditional; academic subjects while others shine in the arts or other areas. Funding that includes strong arts programs in our schools gives children opportunities to work to their unique strengths.

A novel and highly promising way to encourage the arts would be to implement tax-free arts districts as Rhode Island has done. In these districts, the purchase of art created by an artist who lives and works within one of these districts is tax free, any income received by the artist from the sale is tax exempt, and for any gallery located within the arts district sale of original art is also tax-free.