

PROGRESSIVE MASSACHUSETTS

2014 LEGISLATIVE RACES QUESTIONNAIRE



CANDIDATE:

Jessica Finocchiaro

Democrat for State Senator

First Essex

JessicaForSenate.com

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About the Candidate

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

I'm running for State Senate because the incumbent Senator Ives and I vary greatly on what it means to be a Democrat, and furthermore a progressive Democrat.

In 2012 my opponent ran as a progressive Democrat, and now is the 5th most conservative Senator, more conservative than Republican Senator Bruce Tarr (per "Scorecards and Roll Calls" ProgressiveMass.org). That means that she only voted with the beliefs of members 2 out of 16 opportunities. Since she's been elected 2013-2014 Senator Ives had the highest conservative Mass Fiscal Alliance score of any Democrat—voting against both needed revenue and funding. She has been named as "up and coming" at Tea Party rallies, publicly agreed to attend their meetings, and has found support from the Republican community.

I can't stand by while a Democratic elected official votes against the interests of immigrants, people of color, unions, and working families, while upholding the interests of corporations. I'm running because I believe we deserve a nominee who will not be afraid to STAND UP for our communities and advocate for our values.

Top 3 priorities:

-EDUCATION: A better education for our future includes universal pre-k, quality higher education that doesn't leave anyone behind due to costs, increased technical education opportunities

-HEALTHCARE: Let's stand up for our chronically underfunded departments like the Department of Mental Health and others, and show the residents of Massachusetts that nobody gets left behind

-INFRASTRUCTURE AND JOB GROWTH: Connecting our communities for commuters, trade, & tourism; training our workforce in the jobs that employers need

2. What prepares you to serve in this capacity?

Things were tough at times growing up, and that upbringing has kept me focused on how I can help people—from families struggling with mental health issues to improving our schools.

Most recently, I served at the Department of Mental Health, working with 3 medication clinics at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center where I focused on increasing prevention and quality of care for those with mental health issues. I also serve as the President of a nonprofit that offers support, hope and recovery to individuals and families affected by mental health issues.

I also have the honor of being elected to represent Methuen on the Greater Lawrence Technical School Committee. When I was elected many told me to limit my expectations

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much because most of the board was longtime members, and I was one of the youngest members. I brought data, fresh ideas, and a clear understanding to issues on our agenda, and in a short time the committee developed faith and trust in my abilities as a leader and unanimously elected me as Vice-Chair. I was also the only member who was able to get the votes to amend our FY 2015 budget, and even as a junior member I am regularly able to build the consensus needed to gain enough votes to pass initiatives. I've been an outspoken advocate for quality high school and adult vocational programs because I know how vital it is that our students gain the skills and training necessary to find jobs at a livable wage.

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The Issues

Our questionnaire is focused on economic justice and inequality, as outlined in our Shared Prosperity Agenda. We are interested in your overall philosophy and approach to the components of the Shared Prosperity Agenda, as well as your views on specific policy and legislation.

In each section, the first question seeks your overall view, values, principles and priorities. You do not need to address each item embedded in these first questions; they are suggestions.

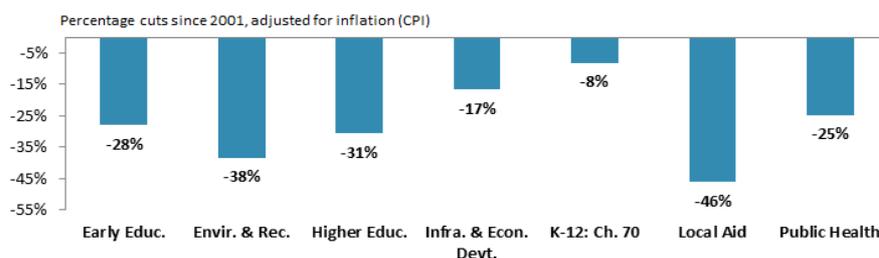
In each section, the second question asks about your advocacy experience; you may leave it blank if appropriate—we do not expect candidates to have a record on every issue. Current or former elected officials: please outline your leadership roles, as opposed to simply your voting record.

Each section features a chart or graph that illustrates one facet of the issue under discussion and is not intended to be comprehensive. All images and data are from Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center (massbudget.org).

A. Revenue and Taxation

Because of income tax cuts and the effects of the recession, Massachusetts has lost nearly \$3 billion in revenue over the last 12 years. We now collect less revenue than 21 other states, and our tax revenue is below the national average. Since 1982, local aid has dropped 58%. Cuts to the moderately progressive state income tax has meant increasing reliance on fees, sales, gas and property taxes, exacerbating the overall regressiveness of our revenue. 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 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.***
Select cuts across the state budget (FY2001 - FY2012)

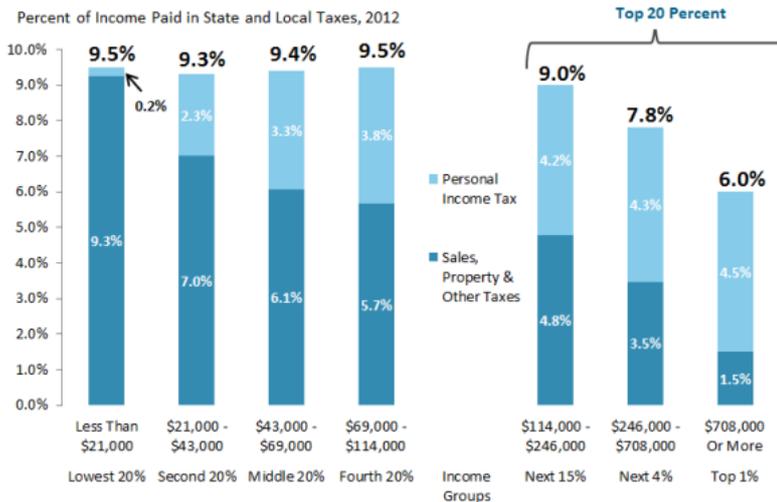


*Ch. 70 figures are adjusted using the inflation factor specified in Chapter 70



Massachusetts state and local taxes are regressive.

Top Earners in Massachusetts Pay Less of Their Personal Income in State and Local Taxes than Do Low Income Earners



3. What principles do you bring to considerations of state revenue and tax reform (individual and corporate)? *How should we raise more revenue to adequately fund our communities for the future?*

I would support a targeted, graduated, and modest increase in the state income tax. I think a much larger conversation needs to be had between legislators and their constituents surrounding moral and fiscal responsibility, so that very clear long-term expectations and investments are secured for vital services and infrastructure.

Local aid has significantly decreased but expenses have increased. Income tax cuts have meant that we rely on other taxes that are regressive and hit working families the hardest. I support “An Act to Invest in Our Communities,” so we can begin to repair the damage of chronically underfunded programs and infrastructure.

4. *Optional/As Applicable*: Please indicate work you personally have done to advance your principles on revenue and taxation (legislation, community work, published writings, etc).

I advocated for “An Act to Invest in Our Communities,” and I believe that a fairer, less complex tax code without corporate loopholes would be a major step towards investing in our community.

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5. **Progressive Taxation.** "An Act to Invest in Our Communities" was designed to raise significant revenue while making our tax code more progressive, but it has not passed the legislature. Would you support a renewed effort to pass this or similar legislation?

Yes

6. **Graduated Income Tax.** Would you support a state constitutional amendment creating a Massachusetts progressive income tax?

Yes

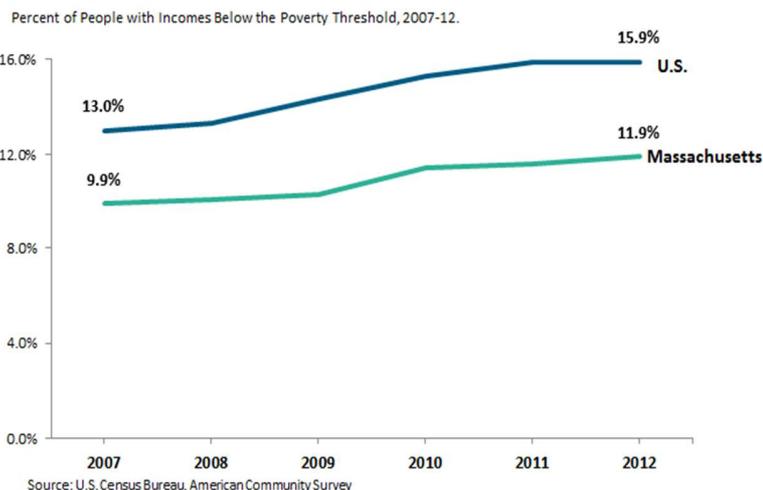
The Tax Fairness Commission established by the Massachusetts legislature in 2013, estimated that roughly "80% of taxpayers [should] experience a tax cut, or at least no significant tax increase" under their proposal which includes a recommendation for a graduated income tax. I believe a well-researched and carefully implemented graduated income tax is both the best economic and moral choice for our Commonwealth.



B. Job Growth and the Economy

The Massachusetts economy has continued to grow and recover from the Great Recession, but the gains have not been shared equally. Poverty levels continue to increase, while the minimum wage loses value every year. Massachusetts now ranks 8th in the nation for income inequality.

Poverty Rates Still Elevated Since Onset of Recession



The Minimum Wage loses value every year to inflation; it is currently 24% lower than 1968 levels.



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7. Share your personal values and principles on job growth and the economy.
How can we improve the economy and economic security for all people? How do we grow the number of good paying jobs in the Commonwealth? How do you view wealth and income inequality, and what would you do about it, if anything?

TAX FAIRNESS: The need to allocate limited resources to critical programs in the Commonwealth is of utmost concern, and tax credits to corporations should maintain specific benchmark goals, or otherwise be systematically reduced or altogether repealed. “Claw backs” should be enforced, and the need to demand repayment and penalties when tax credits are abused is critical to maintaining a fair tax credit system. Savings from reducing or repealing these tax credits should be used towards closing the “skills gap,” so that Massachusetts continues to be an attractive choice for businesses that bring steady middle class jobs to our communities.

LABOR FAIRNESS, EARNED SICK TIME, EARLY EDUCATION: My family has been through some tough times like many families across the Commonwealth. I know what it’s like to need sick time, and I know how heartbreaking it is to see other family and friends without earned sick time when they need it most. Employees deserve to be paid a livable wage. We can reduce the burden on working families by providing early education that both reduces costs for families, while investing in our future generations.

INVESTING IN OUR INFRASTRUCTURE: Expanding public transportation connects us. My opponent voted against the Governor’s transportation and infrastructure bill, and has voted against the gas tax even if it was used for the MBTA if funds ran out. I believe we should keep our roads safe, and offer the public transportation that we need to support commuters, trade, and tourism.

8. *Optional/As Applicable:* Please indicate work you personally have done to advance your principles on job growth and the economy (legislation, community work, published writings, etc).

My only opponent in this race is a one-term incumbent, who after seeking the endorsements of unions in the primary moved to the right and has repeatedly voted against the interests of organized labor. Recently my opponent voted against S.1925 “An act to restore the minimum wage,” stating that she “look[s] forward to continued conversations on this topic as the bill proceeds through the Legislature.” That conversation is now. My opponent also offered an amendment for \$9 dollars/hour instead of \$11, without indexing to inflation. Her amendment if passed would have kept the minimum wage to \$9/hour until 2016 and beyond. My opponent also voted for the Timilty Amendment, which tried to strip the bill of indexing to CPI. My opponent voted against the Pacheco Amendment, which expanded the bill to tipped employees.

Not only do I support the minimum wage increase to \$11/hour to a livable wage in Massachusetts, but I collected signatures in the First Essex district as part of Raise Up Massachusetts, joining SEIU and others early on to fight for two ballot initiatives: raising the minimum wage and earned sick time. I will be a Senator who isn’t afraid to be open

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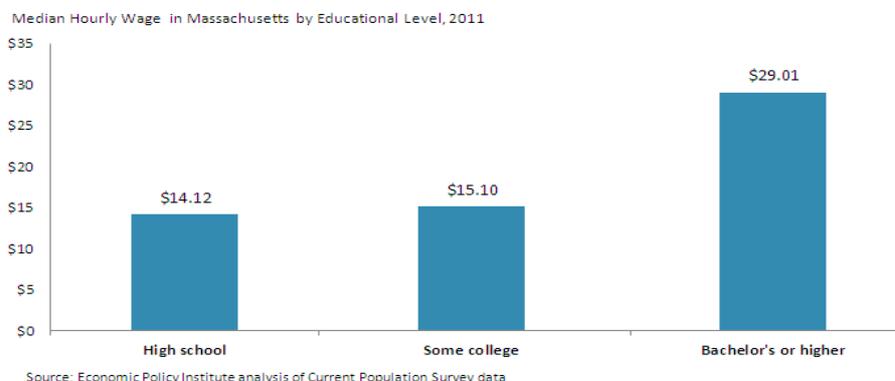
about my beliefs, and who will stand up for working families in the district and across Massachusetts, both with my time and my votes. I won't be the type of legislator that waits for the dust to settle, I'll be the kind of Senator that will stand with activists and be clear and open about my Democratic values.



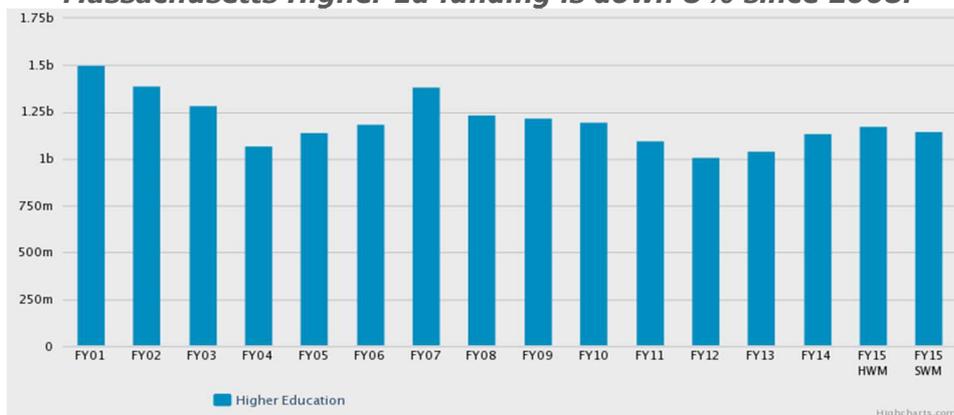
C. Education and Workforce Development

Public education has always been a gateway to opportunity and mobility for all, regardless of economic circumstances, a cornerstone of the American dream for all residents. However, the soaring price of higher education over the last several decades has made access to this opportunity increasingly out of reach, at the very moment when higher education makes a greater difference to one’s economic future. Meanwhile, powerful corporate interests have been steadily undermining public school teachers and unions and siphoning money from our public K-12 system.

Wages and Education



Massachusetts Higher Ed funding is down 8% since 2008.



9. Please share your personal values and principles regarding public education and workforce training.
What value does public education and workforce development have in improving our economy as well as in addressing matters of economic justice? What measures should the Commonwealth take on these issues? You might address, for example, charter schools,

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school vouchers, standardized testing and federal programs like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top.

I believe that we have the ability to give our educational system funding priority so that vouchers would be irrelevant.

I'm frustrated by how much impact where we live in Massachusetts has on the ability to get a quality education. Schools are simply not equal, and every student should be given the fullest opportunity to succeed regardless of their zip code.

As a member of a school committee, it is frustrating to witness Chapter 70 funding decreased while expectations, regulations, and costs increase. It would be a privilege to rally support from other legislators for increased Chapter 70 funding, so it can eventually meet its originally intended funding levels.

10. *Optional/As Applicable:* Please indicate work you personally have done to advance your principles on education and workforce development (legislation, community work, published writings, etc).

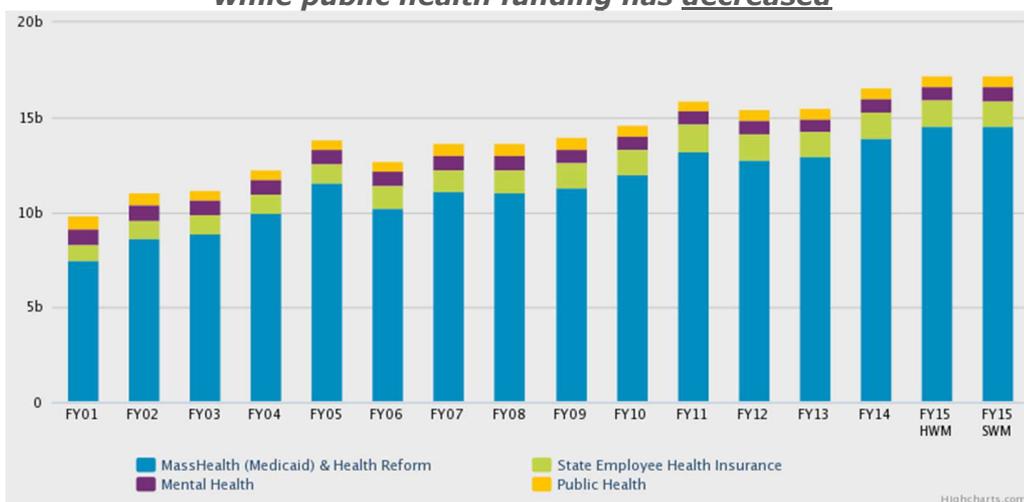
I'm proud to have completed 18 years of schooling, and earn Masters' degrees in both Public Administration and Government, and have always been a strong advocate for education. I especially advocate for the transformative power that education can have for kids who may have difficult situations at home, or who do not have a family history of higher education. I have served as a substitute teacher for Methuen Public Schools, and currently serve as Vice-Chair of my local technical school committee.



D. Health Care

Massachusetts has led the way in providing near universal health care insurance coverage. However, we still spend an oversized portion of public and private money on health care, without necessarily achieving better health outcomes. In 2013, 43% of state expenditures were for health care, a number that is rising while other state expenditures are falling. Ultimately, a single payer system will remove complexity - and reduce costs, while providing better and more consistent care to all Massachusetts residents.

Massachusetts Health Care spending has increased 74% since 2001— while public health funding has decreased



11. Please share your personal values and principles regarding health care insurance, delivery and outcomes.

Massachusetts has long been a national leader in providing high-quality, affordable health coverage to our citizens. But the costs of that are out of control. We need to bring down the cost of healthcare by increasing transparency, and to improve communication between all of your providers and you.

More funding needs to be allocated to reducing the stigma of mental health care, so that those who need our help are able to work towards recovery with trained mental health professionals instead of struggling alone or worse.

We need to increase access to quality mental healthcare because behavioral health is PART of your physical health. The benefits of protecting and increasing funding for mental health services impacts consumers of these services, their families, and our communities significantly. I would be a strong advocate for these programs, especially ones that treat persons with mental illness and problematic sexual behaviors, and post-

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traumatic stress disorders including our veterans, and those suffering from early childhood trauma.

Insufficient resources and income should not prohibit Medicaid/MassHealth patients from securing quality care in their communities. If the system worked as originally intended, hospitals/health centers/private practices would have no incentive to turn away those insured by Medicaid/MassHealth in lieu of private health insurance. As someone who has worked at the Department of Mental Health for several years at the Shattuck Hospital and Massachusetts Mental Health Center, I understand what the consequences of underfunded programs are. Consumers deserve quality care, and we can and should work together to provide the best care possible.

12. *Optional/As Applicable:* Please indicate work you personally have done to advance your principles on health care (legislation, community work, published writings, etc).

I chose to focus on organizational change in one of the most underfunded departments in Massachusetts—The Department of Mental Health, where I advocated for more efficient treatment focused on prevention, reducing costs, and treating the whole client. I was proud to be a part of providing on-site primary care to clients at the Massachusetts Mental Health Care, which was a historic step that can serve as a model for increasing care while reducing costs and sometimes even tapping into new revenue to support more services.

13. Would you support legislation to enact a single payer health care system in Massachusetts?

Yes. I've spent several years focusing on research that weighs the benefits of a single payer health insurance system in Massachusetts, some of which I have presented at conferences.

I grew up as part of a family who had spotty access to healthcare, and myself have been covered by private health insurance as well as MassHealth, healthcare through my college, and through the Health Connector, etc. I saw some members of my family need to choose between paying bills, and paying for their medication, often with serious consequences. I learned even more about my views on healthcare access at the Department of Mental Health—caring for at risk populations, frustrated by how mental health care is not covered the same as any other physical issue.

Because of these life experiences, and many years of research into this issue, I firmly believe that a single payer health insurance system is the best short and long term solution to a long term problem in Massachusetts, which has incrementally driven health care costs to unsustainable levels, and decreased quality of care and access in Massachusetts. We should take substantive steps towards benchmark goals to lay out plans to investigate how a single payer system would impact the Commonwealth.

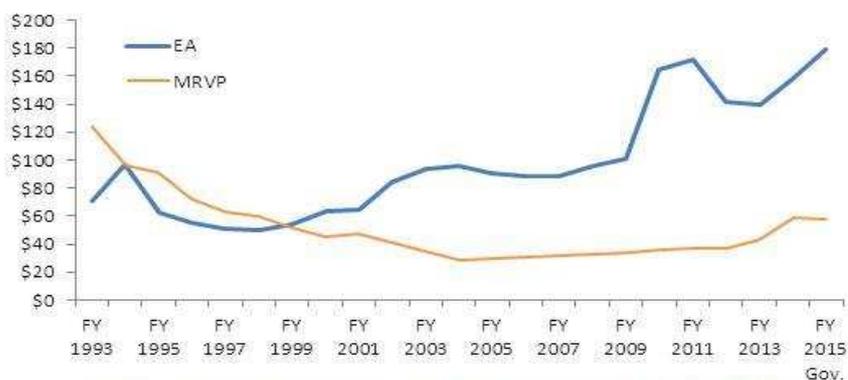


E. Housing

Over the last ten years, the need for affordable housing has increased, while funds for affordable housing have decreased, federal and state. Currently there is a 10-year waiting list for a rental voucher, and the average rent for a two bedroom apartment requires a wage 50% higher than the median Massachusetts wage. Half of families in Greater Boston alone pay over 30% of their income in housing and utilities costs—and 25% of households pay *more than half* their income to housing. 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.

Funding for housing vouchers has fallen-- costs for shelter has increased

(inflation adjusted to 2014 dollars)



Funding for Shelter (EA) and MRVP has moved around since FY 1993. This chart includes funding from the following line items for MRVP: 3222-9024, 3722-9024 & 7004-9024. Line items for EA include: 4403-2100, 4403-2120, 4403-2130, 7004-0101 & 7004-0103.

14. Please share your personal values and principles regarding affordable housing. *How would you ensure that there is suitable housing for all who need it, within reasonable distance of job opportunities? How would you address the need to link housing, jobs and transportation? How would you tackle homelessness?*

I will oppose efforts to eliminate or weaken the comprehensive Permit Statue Chapter 40B, which encourages the development of affordable and mixed income housing in communities that currently have less than 10% affordable housing . I support restoring funding repair existing public housing, new affordable housing, and any changes to 40B that expand the mission, scope and regulation of the statute.

It is critical that we continue to look at the rising costs of healthcare and education in tandem to the rising cost of housing. For example, my healthcare contributions are taken out pre-tax, and my minimum student loan payment is actually 70% of my take home pay. Without a spouse or family who share in the costs (and even then), how could anyone afford housing when 70% of his or her pay goes towards debt repayment?

When I was young we often paid for health care services out of pocket, thousands of dollars that we needed to find while struggling to pay for rent, food, etc. I hope we can

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agree that hopeless circumstances do not lead to a strong Commonwealth, and I would advocate strongly for more affordable housing.

There are other groups that are at risk for homelessness that we should invest in. I support "An Act Providing Housing and Support Services to Unaccompanied Homeless Youth." I support increased funding for the LGBT community, who too often are homeless because their views on their gender identification or sexual orientation are different from their family's views.

15. *Optional/As Applicable*: Please indicate work you personally have done to advance your principles on housing (legislation, community work, published writings, etc).

I've gotten to know clients at the Department of Mental Health who truly needed increased access to housing, and other services, and I support legislation that supports that goal. I've had many conversations with doctors, social workers, and nurses who go out into the community to visit mental health clients who do not show up for appointments, and who try to talk homeless individuals into being open to treatment. I believe we need to adequately fund these programs. I have publicly spoken out against the vote that my opponent took voting to deny public housing and have brought more attention to this issue in the district.

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Additional Comments

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.

I believe in giving immigrants and their families the tools they need to be successful. I am frustrated by my opponent's votes that target immigrants including: voting against in state tuition for undocumented residents, voting for requiring photo ID on EBT cards (and voting against finding out if that would have a negative impact). The American Dream has drastically changed in this country since our grandparents and parents came to this country, and it's time our legislators stood up for that dream.

Some people talk about being able to trace their family to some of the original American families. My family is a family of immigrants, and I proudly talk about being able to trace my family's union membership. I grew up understanding the history of the organized labor movement in America, and why it was important to families across the country. For the past few years I have been a member of SEIU through NAGE Local 282.

We need to continue to advocate for all members of our community, our LGBT community, members of our community who are bullied, people of all backgrounds, heritages, and faiths. We need to continue to advocate for our women, our children, our men, our animals, our environment, our elderly, our immigrants, our family, our friends—all of these people, all of us, need to have equal pay for equal work, and equal access to everything Massachusetts has to offer. If our economy and our laws don't work for everyone, our work isn't done yet.