



PROGRESSIVE MASSACHUSETTS
2026 Governor's Council
ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate: Paul DePalo

Office Sought: Governor's Council District 7

Party: Democrat

Website: www.pauldepalo.com

Social Media Handles:

- **Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/paulmdepalo>
- **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/pauldepalo>
- **YouTube:** <https://www.youtube.com/@pauldepalo5820>

A. Questions about Your Candidacy & Platform

1. Why are you running for Governor's Council?

Governor's Council approves or rejects potential state court judges, parole board members, and has final say on any clemency issued by the Governor. I'm seeking re-election because judges matter on issues that are important to me:

(a) We need to end the trauma-to-prison pipeline. Kids who appear in our Juvenile Courts and Probate and Family Courts are disproportionately dealing with trauma or abuse, kids living in our foster system, and kids with learning or social/emotional disabilities. Once in the system, consequences for typical teenage behavior escalate until they become statistics in our adult criminal justice system. We spend more than \$100,000 to lock someone up in Massachusetts- we could spend far less on early interventions and diversions, and thus put kids on paths of opportunity, not of incarceration.

(b) Mental health challenges continue to overwhelm our justice system, and unaddressed mental health issues (including unaddressed childhood trauma-see paragraph above) lead to recidivism. I want judges who will not only push for the expansion of "specialty" courts (e.g., "Recovery Court," or the "Emerging Adult Court of Hope") that develop and implement best practices for treatment, rehabilitation, and pre-trial diversion.

(c) As Councilor, I've been a passionate advocate for reforming Massachusetts' Parole system. The Council approves Parole Board members (appointed to 5 year terms), and I've been extremely active in recruiting and supporting applicants for this position, as well as pushing the two administrations I've served under (Baker and Healey) to professionalize the Parole Board. When I was first elected, the Board was mostly former prosecutors with no direct experience in re-entry nor expertise in psychology (the two factors I most value in a Parole Board Member). Often, the Board was considered a "stepping stone" to a judgeship. In contrast, the current Parole Board reflects several of my past campaign promises: a racially diverse Board composed of folks with a variety of professional backgrounds (including a social worker, juvenile probation officer, and forensic psychologist), and a Board that is geographically diverse. Yes, Central Massachusetts finally has a member on the Board! Geography matters in this job, because the Parole Board is making decisions about how an individual might integrate into their communities after incarceration, so it's important that Board members are familiar with the constellation of re-entry services available in each unique area of the Commonwealth.

2. What prepares you to serve in this capacity?

I'm an attorney and former Special Education teacher who developed and taught in alternative public school programming for kids with social and emotional disabilities. So, I've worked with kids caught up in the system as both an attorney and an educator. Bringing additional life experience beyond being an attorney is an invaluable asset to the Council.

Importantly, and with each passing day in public service I further appreciate how important this is, I serve with integrity and honesty. I vote according to my principles- I am not transactional. The Council operates mostly behind the scenes, exempt from Public Meeting Law, and pressure to acquiesce can be intense. The Council's purpose is to be a "check" on the Governor, and I've demonstrated time and again that I am willing to vote my conscience regardless of personal or political pressure exerted upon me. Since joining the Council, I have accumulated more "No" votes than any other Councilor.

3. **What factors do/will you consider when determining whether an individual should be confirmed as a judge, a member of the Parole Board, or a member of any of the other boards and positions considered by the Council? How much weight/importance do you give to each of the factors you consider? Do you have any litmus tests?**

I often explore a nominee's philosophy and jurisprudence by asking about recent cases or issues that are developing in the law. For example, as a former special education teacher I've taken a special interest in how brain science is used in our courts. I expect judicial nominees to be conversant in the Mattis and Diatchenko decisions issued by the Supreme Judicial Court. Those decisions, in part, addressed Constitutional concerns by utilizing brain science. Mattis looked at factors relevant to 18-20 year olds' brain development to analyze a Constitutional challenge (in that case, the SJC said that an 18-20 year old cannot be sentenced to life-without-parole). These cases have cracked open the door for potential further legal developments that align with the philosophy of "raising the age" of juvenile jurisdiction and re-thinking the arbitrary line society draws around "age", when in fact the "stage of brain development" is far more relevant in considering an individual's culpability, responsibility, and potential for rehabilitation.

For the Parole Board, I've been consistent and clear: we need mental health experts and folks with experience in re-entry to serve on the Board. We need Board members (1) who can intelligently evaluate a risk and needs assessment (the risk and needs assessment is a professional, evidence-based diagnostic tool grounded in psychology and social science) and (2) who are conversant and familiar with community resources and risk-reduction programs. This work is clearly best suited for someone with a background in psychology or social services and who has experience working with the folks who appear before the Parole Board (disproportionately, that means folks with mental health challenges, histories of substance abuse, and deep-rooted trauma).

I also want judges who are willing to call out injustices in our system, even if they may be bound to obey laws that lead to perverse outcomes. A recent example: there was a nominee to Probate and Family Court in 2026 (Mary Ferriter) who had previously served as Director of an organization that ran a so-called “high conflict parenting class.” Such classes are sometimes necessary and helpful for couples struggling to co-parent; the Family Court sometimes mandates participation in such programs. However, sometimes these classes are simply inappropriate- for example, when one parent is actively (or has a history of) abusing the other parent. I spoke with several women who were mandated to attend the parenting class in question. One woman had an active restraining order against her abuser. Ferriter, as Director of the parenting class, advised the woman to ask the Court to modify the restraining order so that she could take the class with her abuser. Ferriter, in her Governor’s Council hearing, had the opportunity to reflect upon examples like this and repudiate the idea of forcing survivors of abuse to be present with their abusers. Instead of repudiating the class, she defended it and offered what I considered a problematic narrative about a survivor of abuse who was forced to participate in an online class. When pressured to vote to affirm this nominee, I was told that my concerns were “problems with the system, not with this nominee.” But: that’s the point. When our systems fail, we need judges who will be willing to admit, acknowledge, and address the failures- not judges who will shrug their shoulders and make excuses.

One “litmus test” I have is for Superior Court. In Massachusetts, access to reproductive health is protected. However, a rare circumstance where the Commonwealth serves as a gatekeeper is when a child seeking an abortion does not have parental consent. In these cases, the child must petition to a single Justice of the Superior Court for permission. Tragically, these rare cases can be complicated by layers of trauma. For example, what if the victim of incestuous rape can’t access an abortion because her rapist father refuses to grant approval? In this nightmare scenario, I want judges who will unflinchingly support the child seeking medical care- I do not want a judge who, even if well-intentioned, questions or retraumatizes the child before the Court.

4. What issues do you intend to prioritize during questioning in confirmation hearings?

Issues I’ve prioritized in my time on the Council:

- brain science as it intersects with criminal law
- building trauma-informed courtrooms (judicial temperament and how litigants and defendants are treated in our courts)
- the criminalization of addiction and mental health, and how diversionary practices can lead to healing rather than incarceration
- addressing racial disparities in criminal charging and sentencing

5. What role can the Governor's Council play in helping to end mass incarceration in Massachusetts?

As discussed above, supporting judicial nominees who will embrace the continued expansion of "specialty" or "diversion" court programs is an important step towards a justice system that takes a pragmatic approach to criminal justice. We need judges who understand mental health, understand addiction, understand trauma- and who have visited our jails and prisons and seen first hand what sort of "rehabilitation" is or isn't happening there.

6. As a (current or future) member of the Governor's Council, will you commit to ensuring that the judges you confirm will uphold free speech protections at both public and private universities? Explain how your understanding of freedom of speech informs your judicial nominations.

I support free speech and would oppose a nominee who favored any limitations on speech beyond the proverbial "yelling fire in a crowded theater" exception.

7. To what extent do you intend to participate in the *recruitment of demographically and professionally diverse candidates to apply for positions on the various boards under the Governor's Council's purview?*

I am proud of my record, which demonstrates the most diverse judiciary in Central Massachusetts history. Since my election in 2020, I have played a direct role in the nominations of Worcester County's first Black Probate judge, our first Latino Parole Board member, and the first women to serve on Superior Court for decades. I've also championed multiple CPCS (Committee for Public Counsel Services, our public defenders) and Bar Advocates (privately contracted public defenders) who've taken the bench. I personally recruited several social workers to apply for Parole Board, and I regularly conduct outreach in the legal community to coach, support, and advocate for diverse judicial applicants.

8. Many people are unaware of the existence of the Governor's Council. How will you seek to increase transparency and civic engagement if elected?

Regarding transparency, there are presently huge barriers to holding the Council accountable. The lack of press coverage doesn't help, but the Council itself contributes to the problem: meetings are on YouTube, but the camera doesn't pan to whomever is speaking, so it's hard to decipher/follow as a viewer. We don't currently have a majority on the Council to change that camera policy, nor do we even have a majority of Councilors who will agree to abide by Rules of Order. I've worked with colleagues to draft, present, and vote upon Council Rules, but those Rules are routinely ignored. Until the composition of the Council changes, this is the status quo unfortunately. Regarding public and civic engagement, I believe that I am one of the more publicly facing Councilors: I regularly participate as a panelist in issue-based

forums, testify before the legislature on bills, and show up in my communities to support nonprofits and advocates who share my values. It's a slow battle, but I think more people in Central Massachusetts know about the Governor's Council than at any moment in history!

9. *(If a challenger or a candidate for an open seat)* **How would you describe yourself as similar to or different from the current officeholder?**

B. Yes/No Questions

1. **Reproductive Justice - I.** Young people under sixteen seeking an abortion must obtain parental consent or judicial authorization. While most young people involve their parents, many cannot, causing delays to timely medical care and counseling. Scared teens may also turn to dangerous measures: going out of state or risking their lives and health with illegal or self-induced abortion. Would you support repealing this restriction on young people's access to abortion? (Y/N) **YES**
2. **Reproductive Justice -- II.** With the overturning of Roe v. Wade, states are more important than ever as bulwarks of reproductive rights. Would you commit to voting against any judicial nominees with anti-abortion records? (Y/N) **YES**
3. **Police Accountability.** The 2020 police accountability legislation passed by the Massachusetts Legislature contained a number of steps forward, but important measures were left out. Would you support legislation to do the following?
 - a. Eliminating qualified immunity for state and local police and correctional officers so that individuals whose constitutional rights are violated can have their fair day in court? (Y/N) **YES**
 - b. Enacting the recommendations from the special legislative commission on facial recognition, to implement privacy, civil rights, and due process protections to govern police use of the technology? (Y/N) **YES, AS RECOMMENDED BY THE 2022 SPECIAL COMMISSION ON QUALIFIED IMMUNITY CHAIRED BY SEN ELDRIDGE and REP DAY**
 - c. **IMMUNITY CHAIRED BY SEN ELDRIDGE and REP DAY**
4. **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. Do you support the following reforms?
 - a. Eliminating mandatory minimums for all drug offenses? (Y/N) **YES**
 - 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? (Y/N) **YES**
 - c. Decriminalizing consensual sexual activity between adolescents, by creating an exception to the statutory rape law for youth [close in age](#)? (Y/N) **NEED TO STUDY FURTHER**
 - d. Eliminating the sentence of life without parole, which is costly and has been shown to be racist in its application? (Y/N) **YES**

5. **Clean Slate.** The Massachusetts court system maintains a database of name-based court arraignment records, referred to as Massachusetts Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI). Many people are trapped in poverty and shut out of jobs and housing because of the difficult process to expunge their records, even for cases that did not end in a conviction or occurred when they were teenagers. Would you support...
 - a. Requiring the Commissioner of Probation to automatically seal criminal and juvenile records after the applicable waiting periods without requiring individuals to file a petition to do so? (Y/N) **YES**
 - b. Requiring the immediate sealing of a criminal offense if the charge did not end in a conviction? (Y/N) **YES**
6. **Solitary Confinement.** Would you support legislation to create universal access to productive out of cell time with programming, education and vocational training for all incarcerated people? (Y/N) **YES**
7. **Prison Moratorium.** Would you support a moratorium on the construction of new prisons and jails in the Commonwealth? (Y/N) **YES**
8. **Prison Accountability.** Governor's Councilors have the statutory right to make unannounced visits to correctional facilities run by the state. Would you commit to exercising this right in order to improve accountability for the Department of Corrections? (Y/N) If an incumbent, are you already doing this? **YES. I have made several visits to correctional facilities as Councilor.**
9. **Labor.** Will you commit to consulting with labor unions before considering a nominee for the board of industrial accidents? (Y/N) If an incumbent, are you already doing this? **YES. This has been my practice as a Councilor. I note that I also work for a law firm that exclusively represents workers in employment and labor issues (i.e., we do not represent employers as clients). Our firm also represents several Unions.**

C. Voting Record

The Governor's Council is often unanimous in its votes, but there have been several split votes in recent terms. If an incumbent, why did you vote the way you did? If a challenger or not yet elected for the vote, how would you have voted?

- **Vincent DeMore for Parole Board (2026)** NO. Vincent DeMore for Parole Board (2026) This nominee had never attended a Parole Board hearing. We need Board members who (1) can intelligently evaluate a risk and needs assessment of a parole applicant in the interest of public safety (the risk and needs assessment is a professional, evidence-based diagnostic tool grounded in psychology and social science) and (2) are conversant and familiar with community resources and risk-reduction programs. This nominee lacked related experience and expertise. I note that this vote was clouded by alarmist, reactionary rhetoric about needing to be "tough on crime" because of a tragic shooting that occurred on Memorial Drive in Cambridge while this nomination was pending.

- **Mary M. Ferriter for Probate & Family Court judge (2026)** NO. This nominee had been Director at a “High Conflict Parenting Program” that some people attended via court-mandate. This particular program, run by William James College, had been the subject of criticism by participants and spotlighted in the press for its problematic, re-traumatizing, and ultimately unsafe treatment of survivors of domestic abuse. I further explained this vote in response to question #3 above.
- **Gabrielle Wolohojian for Supreme Judicial Court (2024)** YES. Justice Wolohojian, when appointed to the SJC, was one of the senior members of the Appeals Court, where she’d written hundreds of decisions (almost none of which were overturned by SJC). Her education and professional reputation were stellar. This vote was controversial at the time because she’d had a past romantic relationship with the Governor, and my statement at the time noted my discomfort with a woman’s romantic past being used to keep her from a seat of power.
- **Gloriann Moroney for District Court (2022)** NO. This nominee had been Chair of the Parole Board from approximately 2019-2022. I’d been a critic of the department’s direction and performance over those years, including for a failure to hold clemency hearings, persistent uses of outdated conditions of release, continued re-incarceration on technical violations, failing to address concerns of racial equity in the parole system, and failure to hold timely hearings.
- **Michael Callahan for District Court (2022)** NO. This nominee had been Executive Director of the Parole Department from approximately 2015-2018. I’d been a critic of the department’s direction and performance over those years, including for a failure to hold clemency hearings, persistent uses of outdated conditions of release, continued re-incarceration on technical violations, failing to address concerns of racial equity in the parole system, and failure to hold timely hearings.
- **Claudine Coutier for Superior Court (2022)** NO. I was concerned about her position on a woman’s right to choose. While abortion issues are “unlikely” to appear in Massachusetts courts, there are rare circumstances when they may: a minor who lacks parental approval to terminate a pregnancy may need approval from a single justice of the Superior Court. I want to know that, in that rare event, the child petitioning the court would not face any pushback or hesitation in approving their requests. I discussed this issue in response to question #3 above.