



PROGRESSIVE MASSACHUSETTS
2026 Governor's Council
ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate: Tara J. Jacobs

Office Sought: Governor's Council District 8

Party: Democrat

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A. Questions about Your Candidacy & Platform

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

What has drawn you to this office in particular? From the outset, I saw the role that the Governor's Council is empowered to perform to be an opportunity to affect change and play a part in dismantling systemic injustice across the state. My experience on the Council has validated my perception that the Council is a body with the power to affect change, both through the work brought forward for our advice and consent by the Governor, but also through the work I am able to do in community.

My motivations are to serve my district and the Commonwealth through my role on the Council to affect positive change that beneficially impacts communities, specifically the people who come to court who deserve an empathetic, compassionate, unbiased, fair and respectful experience. In my fourth year, having already had a hand in confirming around $\frac{1}{4}$ of the MA judiciary now, I can already see the threads of shifting trends, culture and outcomes that the Healey judicial nominees have brought into the judiciary. I dedicate a lot of time to executive clemency as well, educating people in the community and those incarcerated, on the process of applying for pardons and commutations, in the hopes that the Governor will bring more pardons and begin to grant commutations through the Council. The impact on individuals' lives is incredibly powerful and meaningful to me. Shifting embedded systemic injustice is a slow and difficult process, that is not a solo endeavor, but I contribute what I am able to through my work on the Council.

2. What prepares you to serve in this capacity?

I'm in my second term, and have dedicated myself to ongoing learning. I regularly visit courts across my district and the state, to observe, to listen, and to speak with court officers, probation, clerical staff, and judges and lawyers at each court to better understand what challenges, strengths, and opportunities face each court. I attend parole board hearings. I make it a point to visit houses of correction, jails and prisons, where I listen and speak with both staff/management and incarcerated people. I have attended numerous parole board hearings. I regularly attend learning opportunities: MCLEs, conferences, symposiums, and various meetings held by organizations focused on working to improve our justice system.

I have a Bachelor of Science in Social Psychology Research from Tufts University, and an MBA in Management and Marketing from NYU/Stern School of Business. Prior to moving to the Berkshires in 2006, I had a career first in consumer market research (quantitative), followed by a transition to advertising as an account planner: a brand strategy and consumer insight role informed by primary qualitative research. I draw on a number of these skills in my current role.

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 don't have a specific litmus test, but rather a number of priority areas of focus. I read the packet provided by the Governor's legal counsel, all letters/emails received, and sit down for a private one on one with each nominee prior to the confirmation hearing. I dive deeply into understanding who each individual is who comes before us, their motivations, life choices, attitudes and beliefs, level of understanding and values around trauma, mental health challenges, substance misuse, areas of specific relevance to each court (cognitive development, or needs insecurities), delve into their self-assessment on personally held biases and those present in the specific court. The list goes on. I am looking for red flags. With a lifetime appointment that will impact thousands of individuals, and introduce influence on the judiciary, each nomination is important and deserves careful consideration. I don't have a specific formula for determining how I will vote on a nominee—I consider all the information at my disposal, including often conducting my own due diligence.

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

It depends. Sometimes there's a court specific issue, research, challenge or other important facet that I will choose to highlight. Sometimes there are areas of concern that were raised during the one-on-one conversation that I want to give the nominee a chance to address again. There are several lines of questions I do introduce frequently, that stem from my above list of areas of focus.

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

We can encourage the Governor to grant commutations. We can advocate with the legislature to support various bills that would help reform our system, or budget considerations that would increase access to justice. And, regularly, when vetting judicial nominees to courts with sentencing power, I focus on issues that are directly and indirectly related. For instance, we will discuss specialty courts, diversion programs, bail and sentencing, whether they have visited prisons (behind the wall) and encourage them to do so. I have brought several newly confirmed judges with me to visit prisons, and will continue to do so. The role of Council in this area is more one of influence and persuasion than power to directly affect change. I do what I can.

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.**

Yes.

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 currently dedicate time to this in a number of ways—hosting Pathway to the Bench events across my district, speaking to lawyers in groups, within organizations, or individually, to encourage applicants, and to help create a supportive framework within the Western MA legal community that I hope will shift trends and help overcome some of the logistical challenges my district has faced historically (for reasons of distance and population size among others). I also encourage advocacy groups working on issues related to our justice system to think about the lawyers they see in court, or know, and encourage them to apply for a judicial posting. (I also encourage these groups to think about what they would want to ask a judicial nominee and submit to me a list of questions, that I often will introduce, with attribution, during a public hearing).

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?**

This is an area that I work on daily, literally. I post from the chamber photos of nominees at confirmation hearings to bring awareness to the work I do. I am in community nearly every day, talking about my work on the Governor's Council, interacting with community groups, inviting them into the work through the lens of their experiences. I hold forums educating people on the clemency process, encouraging those that would benefit from a pardon or commutation to apply. I have brought school groups to the state house, to tour and engage with all three branches of government, and learn about what each does, including the Governor's Council (one school group held a mock confirmation hearing with deliberation and a vote). I think my efforts have increased awareness, at least in my district, a tiny bit, but it's still one of the least known or understood roles in our commonwealth.

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**
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) **YES**
 - 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) **NO—visit the prisons, they are falling apart, are unsafe, are designed to be inhumane cages. There are some people who do need to be incarcerated and the current prisons are not designed to rehabilitate anyone.**
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 regularly visit the prisons and jails, and will continue to do so.**
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. I value the experience of the unions in helping inform me when vetting candidates for these boards. I tend to bring their input in through talking through the issues, concerns, experiences and needs for these boards in a holistic systemic way rather than a person-centered approach. Having said that, I am always receptive to hearing people's thoughts and experiences with specific individual nominees and do factor that input into my own deliberations.**

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) I voted No.
- Mary M. Ferriter for Probate & Family Court judge (2026) I voted No.
- Gabrielle Wolohojian for Supreme Judicial Court (2024) I voted No.
- Gloriann Moroney for District Court (2022) n/a, not familiar with case
- Michael Callahan for District Court (2022) n/a, not familiar with case
- Claudine Coutier for Superior Court (2022) would have been a no for anti-choice values.