

PROGRESSIVE MASSACHUSETTS

*2016 Race for the
21st Middlesex*

House District

Endorsement Questionnaire

Candidate Responses

Kenneth Gordon, <http://repkengordon.org/>

GENERAL ELECTION: TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2016

21st Middlesex House District: Bedford; Burlington; Wilmington: Precinct 3

AVAILABLE ON THE WEB

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I. About You

Motivations and Priorities

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

I am running for re-election to complete work I have started. My top priority on a state-wide level is to work for the passage of paid family and medical leave which I filed in the House last session. Locally, I want to continue to provide access to public or semi-public transportation for workers in areas of higher unemployment near my area so they can come to Burlington where there is a labor shortage. And I have filed a number of bills that will provide for mid-career job training opportunities and add flexibility to unemployment insurance/program so that workers can continue to receive benefits while attending this training.

Background and Experience

2. What prepares you to serve in this capacity?

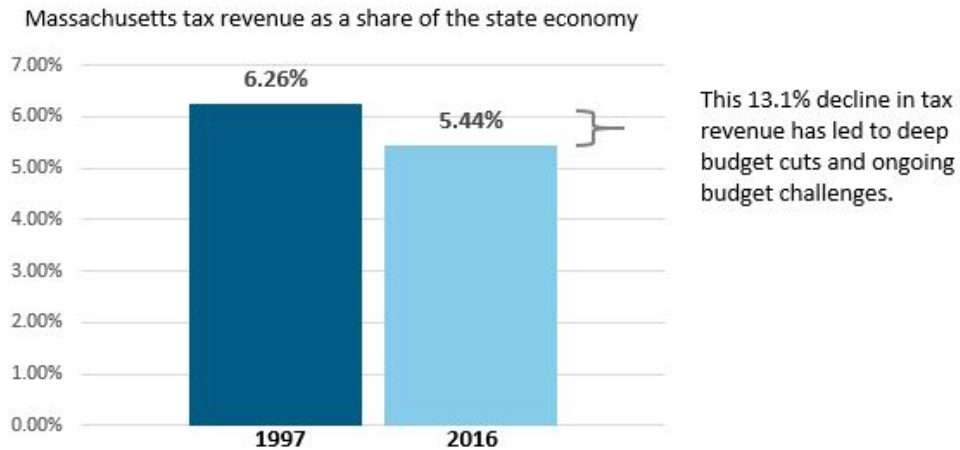
I believe I have been an effective leader in the House especially on employment issues. I have been an employment lawyer for 16 of the 26 years I have been an attorney. I helped pass the increase to the minimum wage two years ago. I was directly involved in passing the uniform wage compliance act and adding gender neutrality to parental leave. I have been to the US Labor Department and various states to bring paid family and medical leave to Massachusetts and in fact I've been invited back to the US Labor Department for a visit this Tuesday.



II. The Issues

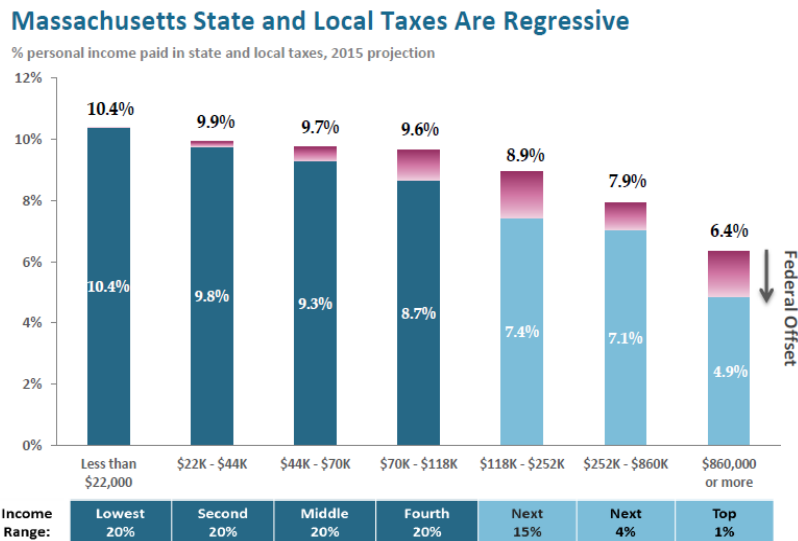
A. Revenue and Taxation

Despite the label of “Taxachusetts,” Massachusetts actually ranks 22nd among states in terms of state and local taxes as a share of total personal income and below the national average. Between 1977 and 2012, Massachusetts reduced state taxes by more than all but one other state. Because of income tax cuts enacted between 1998 and 2002, Massachusetts is taking in over \$3 billion less in tax revenue each year. 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 our revenue. Regressive taxation strains low- and middle-income families, and reduced revenue.



Section A, Figure 1 - Declining revenues have meant drastic cuts, limiting our ability to invest in our communities and future economic stability.

Section A, Figure 2 - Massachusetts state and local taxes are regressive.





Statement/Experience

1. 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 support the ballot initiative that will increase the income tax on wage earners who earn more than \$1 million (but only on the wages that exceed that \$1 million) so that our revenue is collected more fairly.

2. *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 voted to move the constitutional amendment forward.

Progressive Taxation

3. Currently, Progressive Massachusetts is working on a constitutional amendment to increase the income tax on income over \$1 million by 4%. Do you support or oppose this effort (the Fair Share Amendment)?

Support

Sales Tax Holiday

4. It has been demonstrated over and over that the annual sales tax holiday does not serve its intended purpose of increasing sales, but rather just shifts sales to the weekend of the holiday. Will you support or oppose efforts to extend the sales tax holiday?

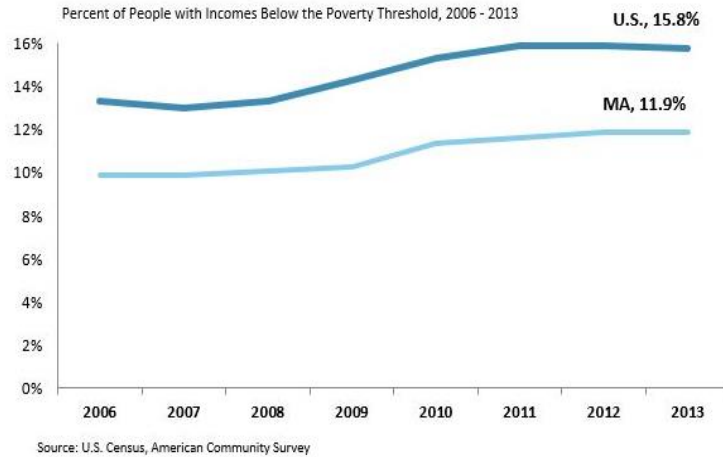
Oppose

I believe the Sales Tax holiday is a gimmick that does not actually help small business while it costs the state \$23 million in needed revenue. All it does is shifts buying patterns, so that people wait for a particular weekend to make a purchase. It only benefits people who can afford large purchases, in any case. I do respect the fact that we should not tax middle class workers any more than we have to, but this is not a solution. I fear, for example, that the lost \$23 million could result in a cut to the military mitigation aid that one of my communities receives if revenues come in less than projected. If that happens, then our 14,000 people will have to chip in to make up the shortfall. By mere math, our residents are better off with the \$23 million in the system to fund this line item, then they are if they have to pay about \$40 per resident to make up for any cut.

B. Job Growth and the Economy

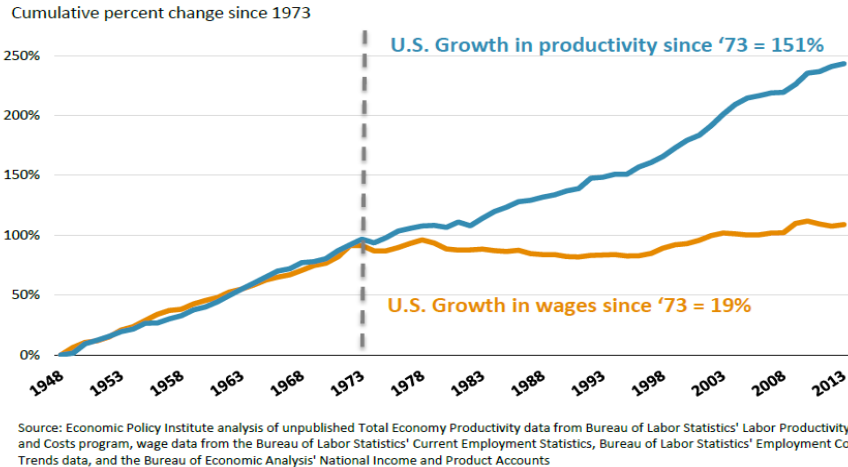
The Massachusetts economy has continued to grow and recover from the Great Recession, but the gains have not been shared equally. Poverty levels continue to increase, while the minimum wage loses value every year. Massachusetts now ranks as one of the top ten most unequal states according to various measures of income inequality.

MA and U.S. Poverty Rates Remain Elevated Despite Years of Recovery



Section B, Figure 3

Growing Wage and Productivity Gap is Our Central Economic Challenge



Section B, Figure 4 - Productivity has grown significantly since the 1970s, but it is not being reflected in higher wages.

Statement/Experience

1. 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?

Job growth has not been a problem in my district. We have between 3.1 and 3.3 percent unemployment and new businesses opening up all the time. What we have is a labor shortage. This is not true in other parts of the state. I have sponsored an amendment to the eco dev bill that will provide a shuttle system to bring workers from areas of higher unemployment to fill jobs in my district. This will keep our businesses in our area, rather than tempting them to move to find labor needs. Similarly, I have sponsored many job training bills so workers they need are available to these businesses. I believe the fair share proposal is a good step to addressing wage inequality.

2. *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.).

See above.

Minimum Wage

3. Do you support or oppose raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour?

Oppose

I do not support raising the minimum wage to \$15 AT THIS TIME. I do support the raise eventually. My problem is one of timing and of credibility. The legislature raised the minimum wage to \$11 an hour by January 1, 2017 in the last session. While many businesses can certainly handle a higher wage, I hope to accomplish this by competitiveness in my district. I do realize this does not work state-wide. But small, non-franchise businesses in my district need time to adjust. I certainly recognize the problem when the CEO of a supermarket or retail chain is making 100 times what his rank-and-file workers make, but the businesses in my area that pay minimum wage are those where the owners are making small salaries themselves (the sub shops, ice cream parlors, dry cleaners). I'm afraid of the effect of an increase coming right on the heels of the current increase to them.

Tipped Minimum Wage

4. Do you support or oppose making the tipped minimum wage equal to that of the regular minimum wage?

Support

California does just fine without a tip minimum. I think it would be great if restaurants would simply pay their staff a fair wage and build it into the price of the meal, rather than allowing their staff to essentially hope that their diners provide an adequate tip.

Indexed Minimum Wage

5. Do you support or oppose indexing the minimum wage to inflation?

Support

Yes. The money workers spend is subject to inflation, so the minimum money they make should be as well. If this is done, then it answers the question regarding the \$15 minimum above and I think this is exactly the way to do it. Small business revenue will rise with inflation as well as costs, so it works out for both.

Paid Family Medical Leave

6. Do you support or oppose efforts to mandate access for up to 12 weeks of Paid Family Medical Leave?

Support

I am the primary sponsor of this bill in the House.



Corporate Tax Incentives

7. Do you support or oppose legislation to impose greater accountability on corporate tax incentives (such as through automatic five-year sunsets or revocation of incentives that do not meet promised job, wage, and benefit standards?)

Support

Corporate Tax Incentives and Good Jobs

8. Do you support or oppose legislation to require any corporation that receives tax incentives to meet wage and benefit standards befitting of a "good job"?

Support

Equal Pay

9. Do you support or oppose legislation to further the principle of equal pay for equal work?

Support

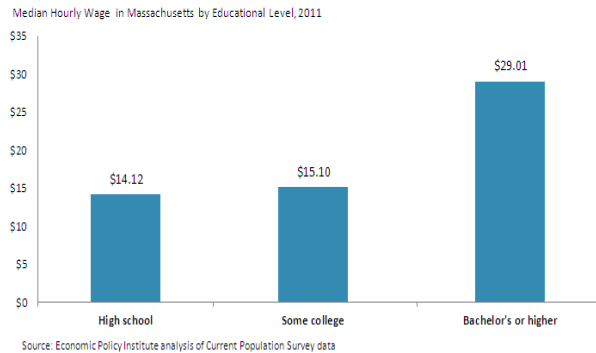
I am proud of the gender equity bill we just passed.



C. Education and Workforce Development

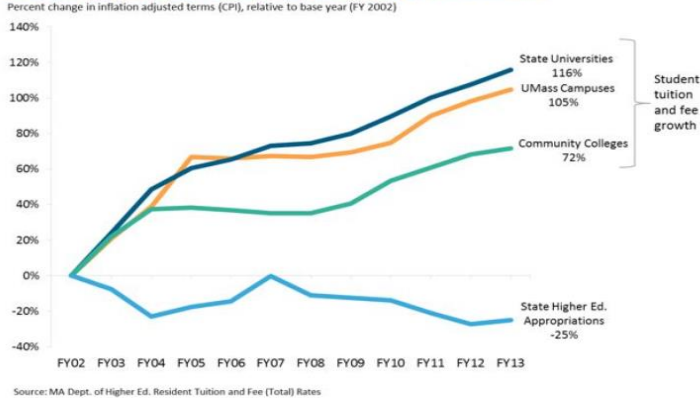
Public education has always been a gateway to opportunity and mobility for all, regardless of economic circumstances, a cornerstone of the American dream for all residents. The mission of public schools is to serve all students, including English Language Learners and those with special needs. However, powerful corporate interests are working to undermine public schools, teachers, and unions. These groups are investing 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. Various forms of privatization are being proposed and implemented, including charter schools and “turnaround” schemes that put private management groups in charge of struggling public schools. Costly, mandated standardized test results are used to justify these privatization schemes. Finally, 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.

Section C, Figure 5 - Higher educational attainment leads to higher wages



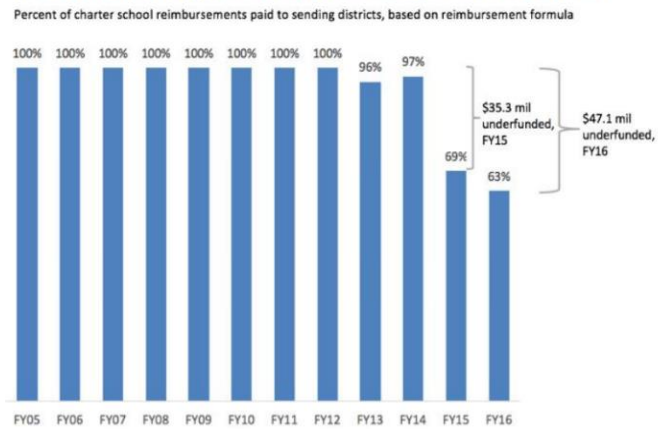
Section C, Figure 6 - Massachusetts has been disinvesting from higher education and shifting the cost burden onto students.

Tuition & Fees Doubled While State Support Declined



Section C, Figure 7 - The state hasn't been living up to its responsibility to fully fund our public schools.

The State Has Not Fully Funded Charter Reimbursements in Recent Years



Statement/Experience

1. 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?*

I filed several bills calling for increased workforce training for unemployed people and for support to our public schools. I am against charter schools as a matter of fundamental fairness -- we should use public money to benefit as many people as possible.

2. Optional/As Applicable: Please indicate work you personally have done to advance your principles on public education and workforce development?

See above.



Achievement gaps

3. What would you do to address persistent racial and economic achievement gaps in education?

I would fund education on a fair basis, so that all students have the opportunity to attend a school that will prepare them for their futures.

Universal Pre-K

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

Support

Standardized Testing

5. Do you support or oppose the use of high-stakes testing for such things as student promotion, high school graduation, teacher evaluation, and the evaluation of schools and districts?

Oppose

I do believe we need standards to measure success, but what we do with them, and how much we test, is something we must address.

Funding Structure

6. Do you support or oppose changes to the Chapter 70 Education formula, including the Foundation Budget, to incorporate proper state funding for ELL students, Special Education students, transportation costs, charter school reimbursements to sending schools, and class size reduction?

Support

Charter School Cap

7. Do you support or oppose the 2016 ballot question that would lift the cap on charter schools?

Oppose

See Question 1.

Charter Accountability

8. Do you support or oppose legislation measures to bring greater accountability and transparency to charter schools, such as by requiring the backfilling of students throughout the school year and by requiring charter schools to adhere to the same disciplinary procedures and public disclosure standards as public schools?

Support

Higher Ed Access

9. Do you support or oppose legislation to grant in-state tuition and financial aid to undocumented students?

Support

I want all children to have an opportunity to better themselves and contribute to society. If a child of a family that may be undocumented receives an education and ends up discovering a cure for cancer, we all win.

Universal Higher Education

10. Do you support or oppose the goal of providing free, publicly funded higher education for every student who wants it?

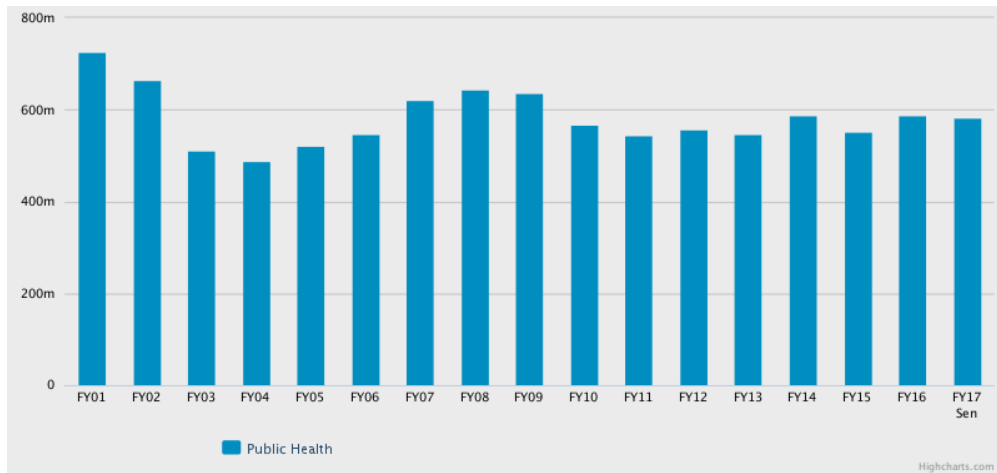
Support

Obviously, we have to look at costs. Perhaps we can't afford the most expensive full scholarship for all students, but one or two years of community college education I think would be a great benefit. We need to explore the costs so this is a qualified yes.

D. Health Care

Massachusetts has led the way in providing near universal health insurance coverage, with 96% of the state having health insurance. But there is still work to do. Significant disparities in health insurance coverage and health care access continue to exist along income, racial, and education lines. Premiums continue to rise, and medical debt remains a persistent problem. We still spend an oversized portion of public and private money on health care, but without necessarily achieving better health outcomes.

Section D, Figure 8 - Public health funding has decreased 19% since 2001.



Statement/Experience

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

I believe health care is a right. We have to pay for it, but nobody should walk around sick because they have no access to health care. I think health care insurance, therefore, should be treated as a community program, just like police and fire. If we all contribute to the solution, it's the only way to solve it.

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

I have filed several successful budget amendments to add transparency to the mental health insurance system.

Single Payer

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

Support

I don't know if we can do this all at once, but it is a goal that we should aim to achieve.

Reproductive Rights

4. Would you support or oppose legislation to support women accessing abortion care without dangerous delay, isolation, and obstruction?

Support

Unconditionally, consistent with Roe v. Wade.

E. Housing

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. Currently, there is a waiting list of up to ten years for a rental voucher, and the fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment requires a wage 40% higher than the average renter wage. Half of families in Greater Boston alone pay over 30% of their income in housing and utilities costs—and over 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

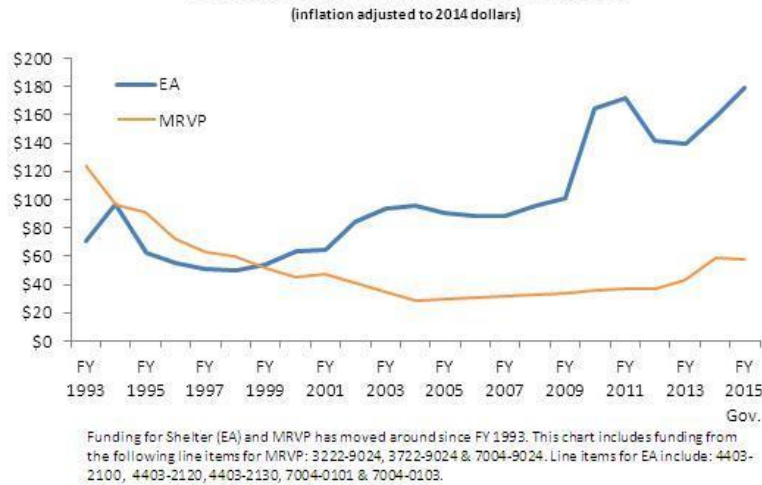


Figure 9

Statement/Experience

1. 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?*

Please see my programs organizing a shuttle service from areas of higher unemployment back to my district. As to affordable housing, I hosted a forum on this topic in Burlington just a few months ago, featuring Undersec Chrystal Kornugay and Chairman Kevin Honan. At least as it pertains to my district, I think we should create incentives and flexibility on the state level to encourage developers to set aside or create more opportunities for affordable housing.

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

Please see above.

Funding Housing Programs

3. (a) Do you support or oppose increasing state funding to housing programs, and (b) how would you work to see increases (if relevant) realized?
 - a) Support
 - b) I filed successful budget amendments to do just that.



Affordable Housing

4. Do you support or oppose efforts to weaken affordable housing goals under chapter 40b, such as by lowering the affordable housing percent in a community to below 10% or counting market-rate housing as "affordable"?

Oppose

Zoning Reform

5. Would you support or oppose legislation to upgrade Massachusetts' zoning laws to encourage more affordable housing and transit-oriented, walkable development and to allow municipalities to adopt inclusionary zoning practices?

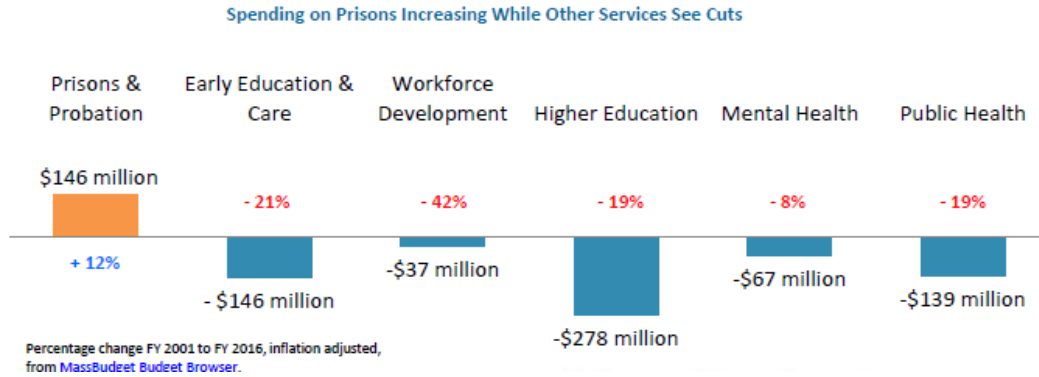
Oppose

I check oppose only because I don't support all of the provisions of the bill that was filed in the last session and passed by the senate because it actually takes discretion away from municipalities in some instances. However, I support all of the goals listed in this question. I just think the language needs fixing.

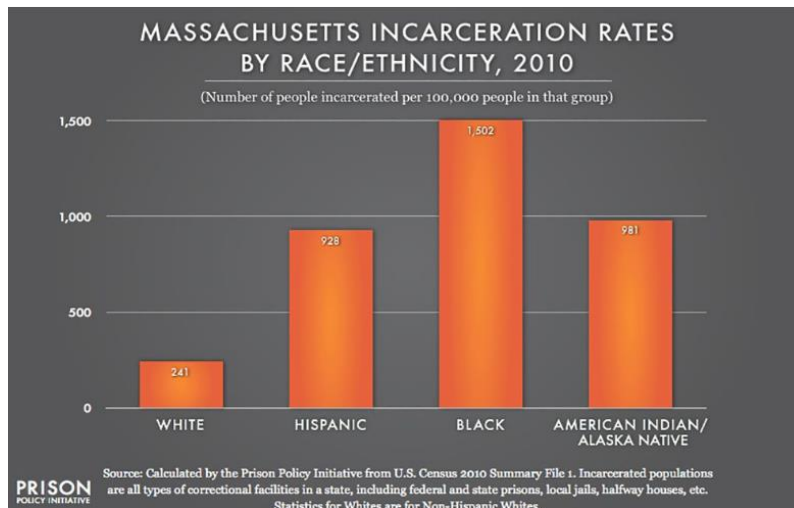
F. Racial and Social Justice

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. The social and economic costs of mass incarceration and the policies that created it, in particular, have put our aspirations of “justice for all” into crisis. We support a judicial system that does not disproportionately target communities of color and the poor, that does not criminalize public health issues such as addiction, that reorients away from ineffective and costly ‘tough on crime’ policies. A comprehensive approach to reform must be taken in all aspects of the criminal justice system.

Section F, Figure 10 - Spending on prisons has increased while other services have been cut.



Section F, Figure 11 - Significant racial disparities exist in incarceration in Massachusetts.



Statement/Experience

1. Please share your personal values and principles regarding Racial and Social Justice.

I have represented victims of discrimination in the workplace for 16 years. Everyone has the right to live in peace and treated with equal rights as everyone else. I proudly voted to extend civil rights to transgender people and co-sponsored the bill, knowing that this vote would be manipulated by activists with a political agenda and used against me in my district. In fact, if I must lose my seat because I stood up for one of the most discriminated against populations in society, then I do so proudly.



2. Please indicate work you personally have done to combat racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, transphobia, and other attempts to marginalize disadvantaged classes.

See above.

Mandatory Minimum Sentencing

3. Do you support or oppose legislation to eliminate mandatory minimum sentences related to drug offenses?

Support

Mandatory minimums on minor drug cases is what has caused, in part, our drug addictions and overdose problems in this Commonwealth.

Safe Driving Act

4. Do you support or oppose the Safe Driving Act, which would remove immigration status as a barrier to applying for a license or learner's permit?

Support

Bail Reform

5. Do you support or oppose legislation to reform the pretrial process (bail reform)?

I can't say either way because this question is vague.

Marijuana Legalization

6. Do you support or oppose the 2016 ballot initiative to legalize recreational marijuana and regulate it like alcohol?

Oppose

I do not think the ballot initiative is drafted in such a way that it can be orderly carried out.

School-to-Prison Pipeline

7. Do you support or oppose legislation to defuel the school school-to-prison pipeline, such as by stopping zero tolerance disciplinary policies?

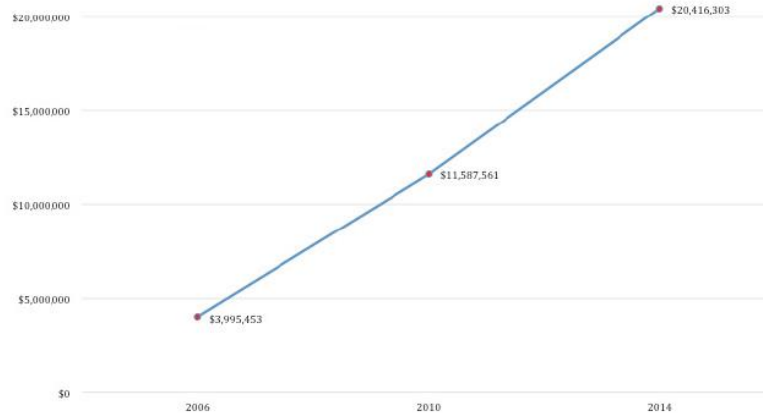
I just don't know enough about this.

G. Good Government and Good Citizenship

The influence of big money in politics is detrimental to democracy. Independent expenditures in MA elections have grown by a factor of five over the past decade. A centralized power structure on Beacon Hill, is undemocratic, and makes it easier for lobbyists to target the top and undermine the system. Key to any vision of good government is citizen engagement. Voter turnout in midterm elections, and especially local elections, remains low. The Election Modernization Act of 2014 helped eliminate Massachusetts's embarrassing status as one of the ten worst states in terms of voting rights, but there is still much work to be done.

Section G, Figure 12 -
Independent expenditures in MA
elections have risen rapidly.
(Source: Common Cause)

MA Independent Expenditure Totals



Statement/Experience

1. Please share your personal values and principles regarding Good Governance Reform.

I am against term limits. I believe that to curb any time of misconduct in government, what we should do is have a spending cap on political fundraising, have a fundraising cap (both of which rise and fall depending on the particular office), and we should expose the names of anyone communicating to influence an election in any way.

2. Please indicate work you personally have done to promote transparency, campaign finance reform, legislative rules reform, and access to voting.

Power and the Legislature

3. If elected, would you support or oppose efforts to dilute the amount of power held by leadership in your respective branch of government? For example, would you support a rule change allowing committees to appoint their own chair, instead of leadership?

I think that if we limit campaign financing as I propose, then it will provide greater opportunity for people to become involved in government and that will address the problem more directly than what the question suggests. I think that with 160 members in the House we do need some form of leadership organization.



Public Campaign Financing

4. **Public campaign financing.** Do you support or oppose legislation to create a robust public financing system for state elections?

Support

Absolutely.

Election Day Voter Registration

5. **Election day voter registration.** Do you support or oppose Election Day Registration?

Support

Of course.

Automatic Voter Registration

6. **Automatic voter registration.** Do you support or oppose automatic voter registration?

Support

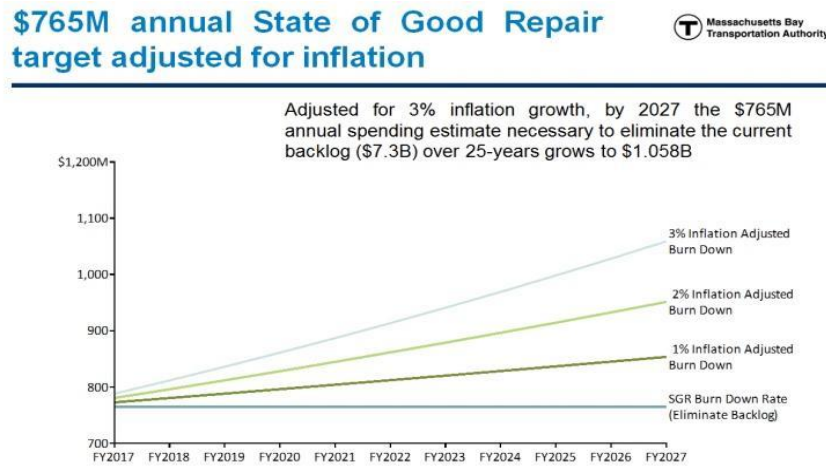
Same here.

H. Sustainable Infrastructure and Environmental Protection

Massachusetts will be hit particularly hard by climate change. In order to avoid catastrophic climate change, global carbon emissions need to be reduced by 70% by 2050 and brought to 0 by 2080. Massachusetts has been a leader in increasing energy efficiency and reducing carbon production and must continue this leadership role in the United States. This 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.

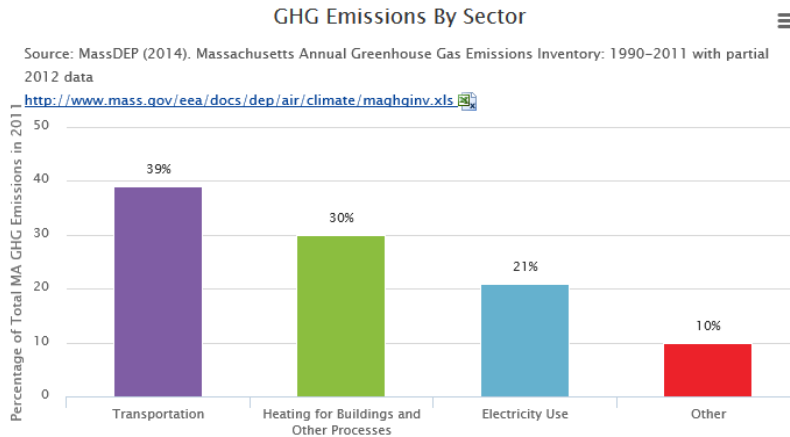
Public transit must play a role in decarbonizing our transportation system, as well as advancing complementary goals of equity and inclusion. However, Massachusetts politicians have lost their understanding of public transit as a public good that benefits all residents and businesses in Massachusetts, 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 \$5.5 billion, with over \$7 billion in deferred maintenance costs. Regional Transit Authorities that serve communities, including Gateway Cities across the state, face enormous capital needs as well.

Figure 13 - The cost of keeping transit in good repair grows as we continue to defer maintenance.



massDOT

Figure 14 - Transportation is currently the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in MA, although heating and electricity are also major



Statement/Experience

1. Please share your personal values and principles regarding Sustainable Infrastructure and Environmental Protection.

We must turn toward clean, renewable energy as soon as possible. We are killing our planet. Some politicians are confusing science with politics.

2. Please indicate work you personally have done to protect the environment and expand access to public transportation.

I have solar panels on my house and my wife and I both drive hybrids. I have sponsored a system of shuttles that bring workers to my district without driving their own cars. I helped bring an intra-municipal shuttle to Bedford.

Global Warming Solutions Act

3. Earlier this year, the Massachusetts SJC ruled that the state has not met the emissions reductions requirements of the 2008 Global Warming Solutions Act. What steps would you support to meet and go beyond the targets set by this act?

We must provide incentives for businesses to turn to clean energy, and dis-incentives for them to rely on dirty energy by making it cost-effective for them to transition to clean forms.

Funding Climate Change Adaptation

4. Will you support or oppose increasing funding and collaboration between state and local governments on resiliency and climate adaptation efforts to help mitigate the consequences of climate change?

Support

Solar Energy

5. Do you support or oppose efforts to increase equitable access to solar power by pushing to remove caps on solar generation and restore compensation for low-income and community solar?

Support

Carbon Fees

6. Do you support or oppose legislation to put a fee on carbon emissions?

Support

I support it in a revenue neutral way. Companies can save any fee on carbon emission by reducing their emission.

Gas Pipelines

7. Do you support or oppose the expansion of gas pipelines in the state?

Oppose

We should fix the gas leaks before we expand to new pipelines.

MBTA Fiscal Challenges

8. Do you believe that the fiscal problems facing the MBTA can be solved by reform alone, or is new revenue require? Which reforms? Which additional revenue sources?

Reform is important. We may need more revenue but we are not there yet. As a member of the transportation committee I have seen evidence that our system can be improved within current funding (now that the \$500m has been restored).



MBTA Fare Hikes

9. Do you support or oppose capping MBTA fare hikes at 5% (or less) for every two-year period?
Support

III. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Limit answer to 250 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. *Optional response; not all candidates chose to respond.*