

Gretchen Van Ness

14th Suffolk

State Representative

Endorsement Questionnaire

Office Sought: State Representative

Legislative District: 14th Suffolk

Party: Democratic

Website: www.gretchenvanness.org

Twitter: [@vannessforma](https://twitter.com/vannessforma)

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Primary: September 4

Election: November 6

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Introduction: Progressive Mass

About

Progressive Massachusetts is a statewide, grassroots organization committed to working toward shared prosperity, racial and social justice, good government and strong democracy, and sustainable infrastructure and environmental protection. It was founded 5 years ago by local organizers from the Patrick and Obama campaigns in order to continue to move forward progressive values and issues in Massachusetts.

Advancing a progressive agenda in Massachusetts requires electing legislators who share--and will fight for--our values, and then holding them accountable.

Membership

One of the benefits of being a dues-paying member of Progressive Massachusetts is that you get to participate in our endorsement votes for key elections, helping to shape the future direction of progressive policymaking in the state. **Not yet a member? Join!** ProgressiveMass.com/member

How Endorsements Work

Progressive Massachusetts sends candidates this detailed policy questionnaire, revised periodically by the Elections & Endorsements Committee (EEC). The EEC may choose to make a recommendation in a given race, but the ultimate decision lies with you--the members. In each race, you can choose to vote for a **candidate**, vote “**no endorsement**,” or **abstain**. Candidates who receive at least 60% of all ballots submitted in their respective race will be endorsed by Progressive Massachusetts. If no candidate in a race reaches the 60% threshold, we will not endorse. Regardless of whether or not we endorse, all questionnaires will be made available on our website as a public service.

Sources

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).

I. About the Candidate

Gretchen Van Ness

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

Gretchen Van Ness: I am running for State Representative of the 14th Suffolk district because, if elected, I will have the opportunity to continue to make real change on the progressive issues I've been fighting for my entire life. My top three priorities as State Representative would include progressive taxation, economic and social equity and bringing communities together on intersectional issues that impact the entire Commonwealth.

2. What prepares you to serve in this capacity?

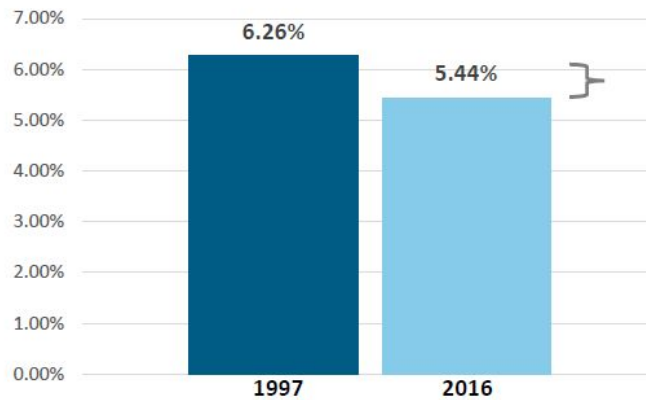
Gretchen Van Ness: I have spent more than three decades fighting to protect and advance the rights and liberties of all Massachusetts residents. As President of the Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts, I was recognized as a Best of Boston attorney by Boston Magazine and honored as a Massachusetts Super Lawyer. I have also represented clients before the U.S. Supreme Court, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, and the state and federal appellate and trial courts. I served as President of the Board of Hyde Jackson Square Main Street, and I currently serve as a co-chair of the Zoning Committee of the Fairmount Hill Neighborhood Association. I am a member of the steering committee of Boston South Fair Skies and a member RISE (Roslindale is for Everyone). I attended Wilson College and was a plaintiff in the first lawsuit in the nation that succeeded in reversing a Board of Trustees' decision to close a college. I am also a graduate of Boston College Law School, where I received a fellowship from the American Association of University Women and served as editor-in-chief of the Boston College Law Review.

A. REVENUE AND TAXATION

Despite the label of “Taxachusetts,” Massachusetts 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 losing over \$3 billion 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 the system. 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.

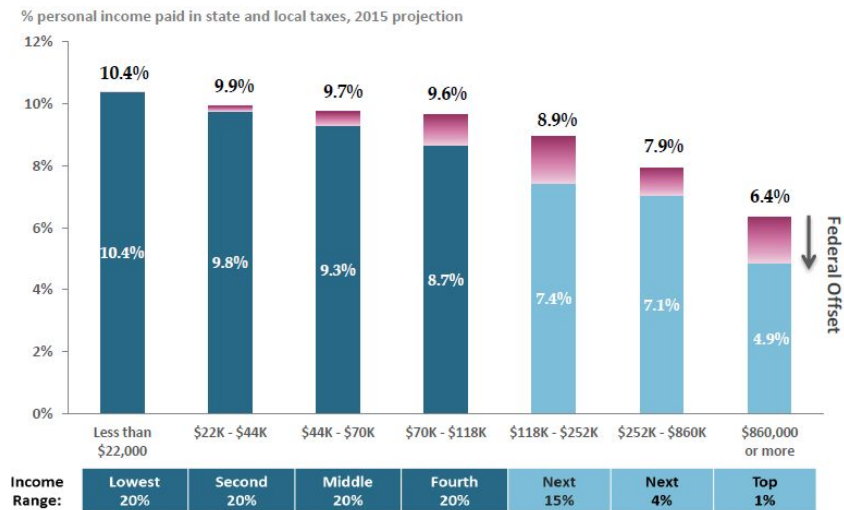
Declining revenues have meant drastic cuts, limiting our ability to invest in our communities and future economic stability.

Massachusetts tax revenue as a share of the state economy



This 13.1% decline in tax revenue has led to deep budget cuts and ongoing budget challenges.

Massachusetts state and local taxes are regressive.



* Percentages shown inside bar are net effective tax levels after factoring in federal offset. Percentages above bars show tax levels before federal offset.

Source: Institute for Taxation and Economic Policy.

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?*

Gretchen Van Ness: It is high time that we update our tax structure. This will be an uphill battle and I'm willing and prepared to fight for a progressive income tax and any other policy changes that will reverse the regressive tax policies of the past two decades. I strongly believe that people in the Commonwealth are starting to realize that there are ways to use tax reform to fund important public services and desperately-needed infrastructure improvements. I would also steer these investments toward small businesses in Massachusetts because they are critical economic drivers in our communities.

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.).*

Gretchen Van Ness: As a leader in the Women's Bar Association during the Celluci and Romney administrations, I worked to oppose their tax cuts and the related burdensome fee increases that transferred needed revenue generation to everyday citizens. I would welcome the opportunity to join with progressive leaders at the State House in reversing these misguided policies.

3. *Progressive Taxation. Currently, Progressive Massachusetts is working on a constitutional amendment to increase the income tax on income over \$1 million by 4% (Fair Share Amendment, sometimes referred to as the "Millionaire's Tax"), which will be on the 2018 ballot. Do you support this ballot question?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes. I plan to incorporate this campaign into my personal campaign. Progressive taxation is one of my top priorities.

4. *Sales Tax Holiday. 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. Would you oppose efforts to extend the sales tax holiday?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes. The sales tax holiday is in reality a tax on our most vulnerable communities because they are the ones that disproportionately pay for the lost revenue.

5. *Corporate Tax Breaks & Disclosure. Do you support the state's collecting and publicly disclosing the information about the benefits actually provided by corporations receiving tax credits?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes. I have long advocated for precisely this policy.

6. *Corporate Tax Breaks & Wages. Do you support requiring any company receiving tax credits from the state to pay a living wage and provide good benefits to all its employees?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes. It's up to us to repair the social contract and hold our corporations accountable.

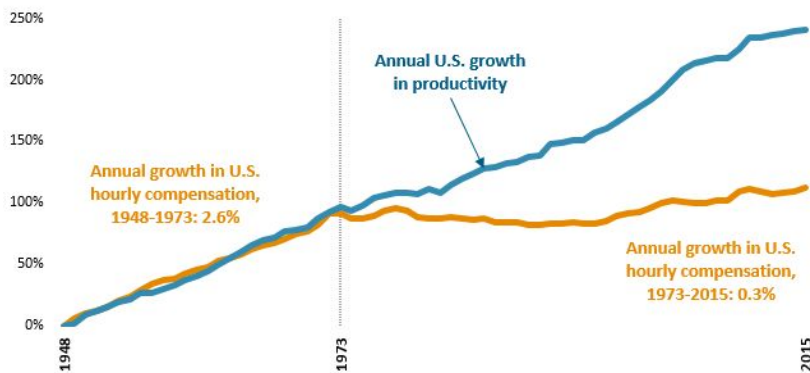
B. JOB GROWTH AND THE ECONOMY

The Massachusetts economy has continued to grow and recover from the Great Recession, but the gains have not been shared equally. According to various measures of income inequality, Massachusetts now ranks as one of the top ten most [unequal states](#). We are one of the most expensive states in the country for [health care](#), [housing](#), and [child care](#), all of which strain wages. Most MA workers do not have access to paid medical leave, and only a small fraction have access to paid family leave--gaps that force people to choose between their (or their family's) health and their job.

Productivity has grown significantly since the 1970s, but it is not being reflected in higher wages.

A Large Gap Has Opened Between Wage and Productivity Growth Since 1973

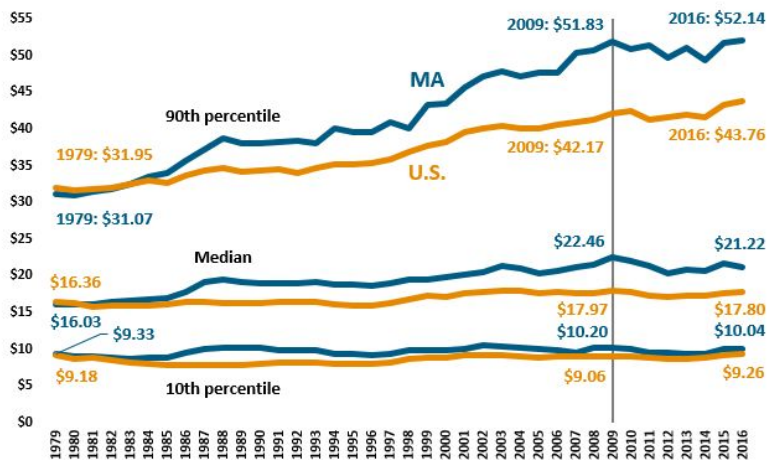
Cumulative Change in U.S. Hourly Wages for Private-Sector Production/Non-Supervisory Workers and Net Productivity, 1948-2015



Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of unpublished Total Economy Productivity data from Bureau of Labor Statistics' Labor Productivity and Costs program, wage data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Employment Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics' Employment Cost Trends data, and the Bureau of Economic Analysis' National Income and Product Accounts
 Note: Wages are the inflation-adjusted average hourly compensation of private-sector production/nonsupervisory workers.

Wages For Most MA Workers Have Stagnated Since Great Recession

Real Value of Hourly Wage for Selected Wage-Earning Groups in MA and U.S., 1979-2016 (2016\$)



Source: Economic Policy Institute analysis of Current Population Survey data (deflated using CPI-U-RS).

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?

Gretchen Van Ness: We can improve the economy and economic security of all people by identifying and removing barriers to equitable economic participation. Among the many things that we can do, we must make sure that apprenticeship and job training programs are the pinnacle of making our policies work for everyone. It is critical that we support entrepreneurs, especially women, immigrants and people of color, because they are powerful job creators. Sectors having the greatest potential for growth include the green economy, technology, education and healthcare, which should all be expanded. I view wealth and income inequality as the moral issue of our time. It is our responsibility to be as bold and progressive in solving these issues as the New Deal generation was when they created Social Security, Medicare, banking regulations, fair labor standards, fair housing standards, and more.

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.).*

Gretchen Van Ness: I served as President of Hyde Jackson Main Streets where we worked to support local and immigrant-owned businesses through a variety of innovative programs. I strongly believe that we must increase the minimum wage and work towards the idea of a living wage for all as an important step in closing the income gap. Additionally, I have litigated for paid family and medical leave, including on behalf of an individual who was fired the day after she told her employer she was pregnant.

3. **Increasing Wages.**

a. **Minimum wage.** *Do you support raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

b. **Tipped Minimum Wage.** *And making the tipped minimum wage equal to that of the regular minimum wage?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

c. **Indexing the Minimum Wage.** *And indexing the minimum wage to inflation?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

4. **Paid Leave.** *Do you support requiring access to up to 16 weeks of paid family leave and 26 weeks of paid medical leave?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes. We are still behind other industrialized countries in providing this essential safety net for families.

5. **Wage Theft.** *Do you support legislation to hold businesses responsible for the wage violations of their subcontractors when the work they do is substantially connected to the company's operations?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

6. **Youth Jobs.** *Do you support greater reinvestment in youth employment and vocational training*

programs?

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes. In addition, youth should not be excluded from a living wage!

7. **Privatizing Public Services.** *In 2015, the MA Legislature, urged by Governor Baker, voted to waive the so-called Pacheco Law for the MBTA. The Pacheco Law contains strong safeguards to ensure that state services are not privatized when doing so would harm workers and state revenue. Do you support reinstating the Pacheco Law?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

8. **Economic Democracy.** *Would you support legislation to foster and develop employee ownership of businesses in Massachusetts and encourage the formation of cooperatives and/or benefit corporations?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

C. EDUCATION

The promise of public education has always been as 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.

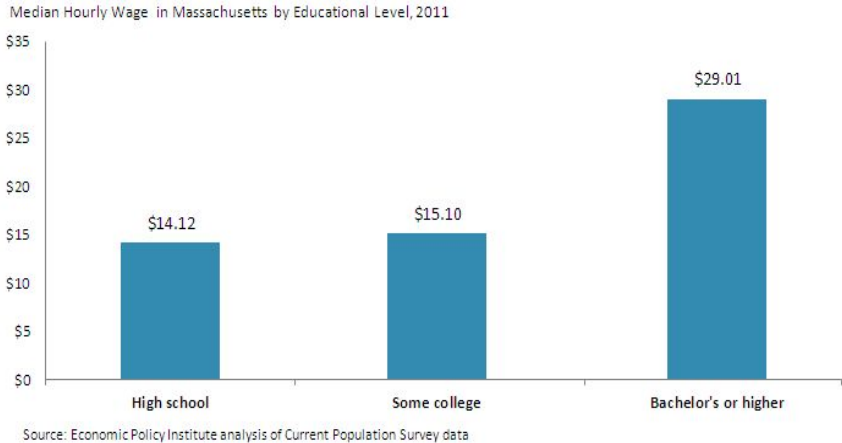
The state hasn’t been living up to its responsibility to fully fund our public schools.

The State Has Not Fully Funded Charter Reimbursements in Recent Years

Percent of charter school reimbursements paid to sending districts, based on reimbursement formula

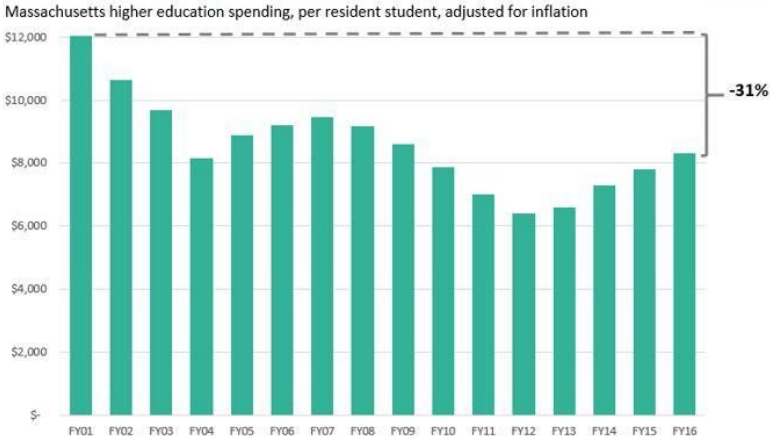


Higher educational attainment leads to higher wages.



Massachusetts has been disinvesting from higher education and shifting the cost burden onto students.

Per Student, Higher Ed. Cut by 31 Percent Since FY 2001



1. *Please share your personal values and principles regarding public education. What value does public education have in improving our economy as well as in addressing matters of economic justice? How can we close persistent achievement gaps? What measures should the Commonwealth take on these issues?*

Gretchen Van Ness: I am a proud product of public schools and in fact, my education taught me that in order to change policy, you must fight for it. Boston invented public education and it is our duty to re-invent the currently broken education system in our Commonwealth. Well-funded public education is the key to a healthy and robust democracy and the foundation for individual and community success and well-being.

Standardized testing should not drive our curriculum, and charter schools should not weaken our public school system. I also support student debt loan forgiveness.

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

Gretchen Van Ness: I worked on school board elections growing up in Rochester, NY. As a trustee at my college, I worked on admissions reforms to make it easier for public school graduates to attend college. As an attorney, I was a part of the Massachusetts Bar Association's mock trial program, where I helped coach students in Dorchester. The stories these students and their teachers told me about their lives continue to inspire me to this day.

3. *Universal Pre-K. Would you support creating universal, free Pre-K, accessible to any resident of Massachusetts, integrated into the public school system?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes. My mother is an early childhood development expert so I know the importance of universal and accessible education programs.

4. *Standardized Testing. Do you 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?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes. I attended a high school that didn't have high-stakes testing. I strongly believe that the effectiveness of schools and school districts is measured by more than tests, and we must take a more comprehensive view.

5. *Equitable Funding. Do you support changing 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?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes. The formula has not been updated since the 1990s. It's critical not only to reform the funding formula now to address current needs, but also to implement sunset provisions and regular review so that funding is dynamic and responds to real-world changes and challenges.

6. *Charter Schools. Last November, Massachusetts voters overwhelmingly rejected a ballot initiative to lift the cap on charter schools given the millions of dollars it would have siphoned away from public schools.*

a. *Would you support keeping the cap on charter schools?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

b. *Would you support legislation to bring **greater accountability and transparency to charter schools**, such as by requiring them to adhere to the same disclosure and disciplinary standards as public school districts?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

7. **Higher Education Access.** *Would you support legislation to grant in-state tuition and financial aid to undocumented students?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

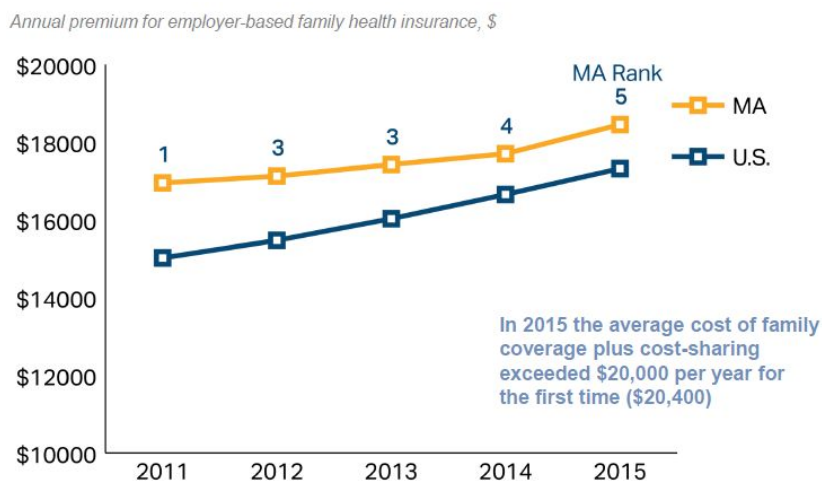
8. **Tuition-Free Higher Education.** *Would you support making tuition free at public colleges and universities?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

D. HEALTH CARE

Massachusetts has led the way in providing near universal health insurance coverage, with 97% of the state having health insurance. We provided the blueprint for the national Affordable Care Act, with an insurance-based reform passed by the Democratic Legislature and signed by Republican Governor Romney. While the reforms of President Obama's Affordable Care Act are under assault by Republicans (who control the Executive and both legislative chambers), Massachusetts could lead in more progressive health care reforms. Even without the Republican dismantling of national reforms, there is still work to do right here in Massachusetts. MA's Democratic Legislature passed, and the Republican governor signed, the ACCESS bill in 2017--protecting the right to no-fee contraception, which is (federally) under threat: Where our federal advances are being rolled back, Massachusetts could--and should--push progressively forward. 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.

MA has among the highest health insurance premiums in the country.



Source: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Medical Expenditure Panel Survey, Insurance Component

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

Gretchen Van Ness: Massachusetts may have the best health care in the country, but it is a two- or three-tiered system that separates people by wealth and status. This must change. I support moving to a single-payer health care system and requiring all health care providers to show that they are providing care to everyone in the Commonwealth, regardless of their status.

2. *Optional/As Applicable: Please indicate work you personally have done to advance your principles on*

health care (legislation, community work, published writings, etc.).

Gretchen Van Ness: Making our health care system more just and equitable is part of my platform and I am advocating for it on the campaign trail. My partner is a nurse at Dana Farber, so we have first-hand experience with these issues.

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

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

4. ***Reproductive Rights.** Would you support legislation to guarantee women access to abortion care without dangerous delay, isolation, and obstruction?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes. I have advocated for women's reproductive rights and reproductive health throughout my life and firmly support the constitutional right to safe and legal abortion.

5. ***Dental Care.** Do you support the authorization of dental therapists in Massachusetts, similar to a nurse practitioner or physician assistant, in order to expand access to dental care?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes. We also need to include dental care and eye care as part of the preventive care included in everyone's health insurance policies.

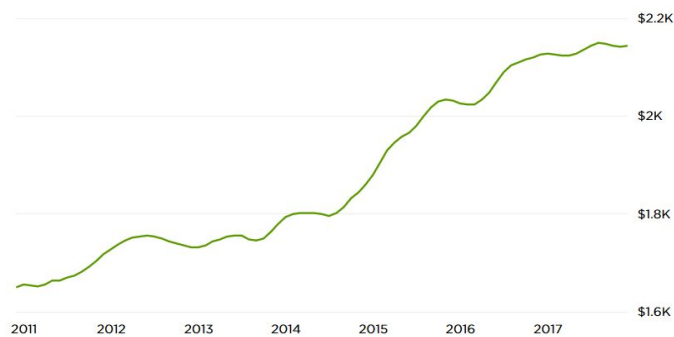
6. ***Prescription Drug Pricing.** Would you support a drug transparency law, like the one recently passed in California, that requires pharmaceutical companies to publicly justify steep price increases?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

E. HOUSING

Massachusetts has a lot to offer, but that does little if people can't afford to live here. Although Massachusetts ranked #1 last year in the [US News & World Report's state ranking](#), we were #45 in cost of living and #44 in housing affordability. A worker earning minimum wage in Massachusetts would have to work [80 hours a week](#) to afford a modest one bedroom rental home at market rate (and almost 100 hours a week in Metro Boston). 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. The Commonwealth is at risk of losing [14,231 subsidized units](#) by December 31, 2019, as subsidies expire and owners convert properties into market-rate condominiums. 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. There is a waiting list of up to ten years for a rental voucher. 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.

Median rents have gone up by more than 30% since 2011.



(source: [zillow.com](#))

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?

Gretchen Van Ness: We must revise the income guidelines for affordable housing in Massachusetts so that it includes those households that are “housing insecure.” We must continue to invest in decentralized affordable housing in every community, and we must take a regional approach to improving and expanding mass transit and all forms of public transportation so that the neighborhoods and communities where people live are linked to the neighborhoods and communities where people work.

I believe in the Housing First approach to homeless. We begin to solve homelessness by making sure people have homes, not temporary shelters or motel rooms. Health care, job training and support, and education all flow from there.

2. Optional/As Applicable: Please indicate work you personally have done to advance your principles on

housing (legislation, community work, published writings, etc.).

Gretchen Van Ness: I have supported the work of the Women’s Lunch Place, helped create a pro bono legal services program for homeless women when I was a leader in the Women’s Bar Association, and I support Friends of Boston Homeless.

3. **Funding.** *Do you support increasing funding for affordable housing production (especially low-income housing units) and the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

4. **Housing Preservation.** *Currently, certain property owners who guarantee affordable rents have been incentivized by subsidized mortgages via the 13A program. However, many of the contracts under 13A are set to expire in 2019. Do you support giving cities and towns the authority to require such apartments to remain affordable?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

5. **Foreclosure Prevention.** *Do you support a requirement that banks mediate in good faith with homeowners to seek alternatives before beginning foreclosure proceedings?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

6. **Zoning Reform.** *Would you support legislation to upgrade Massachusetts’s zoning laws to encourage more affordable housing and transit-oriented, walkable development and to promote inclusionary zoning practices?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

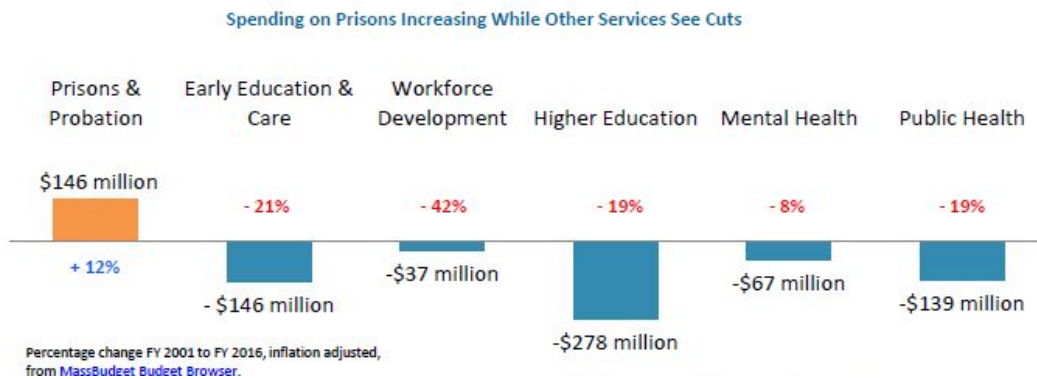
7. **Combating Speculation.** *Do you support imposing a graduated tax on private real estate transactions over \$2.5 million, with the money allocated to affordable housing trust funds?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

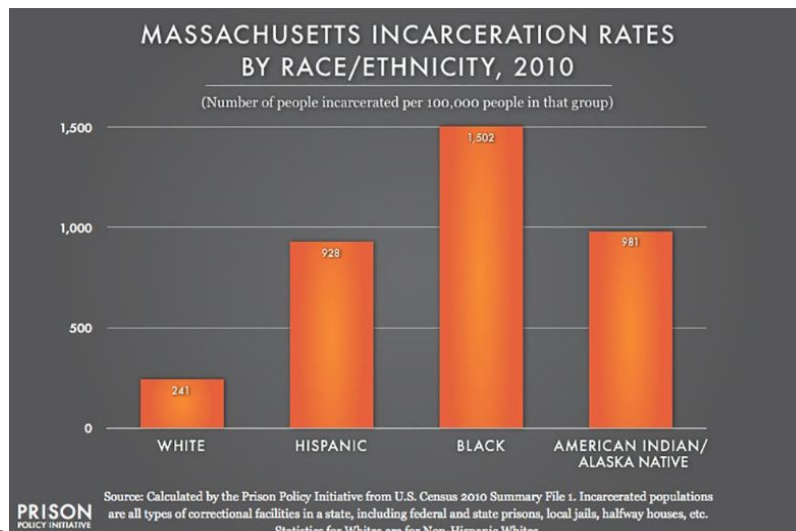
F. RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

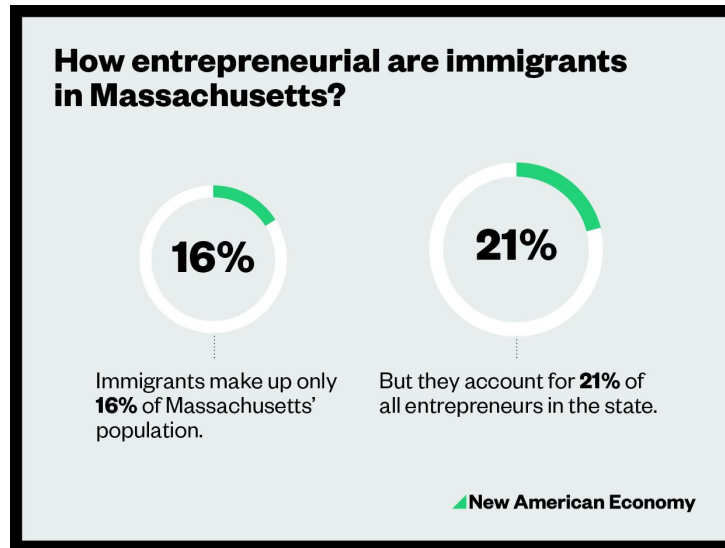
Massachusetts must continue to strive to be a state that welcomes and embraces all of its residents and combats prejudice and discrimination of all kinds. The social and economic costs of mass incarceration and the policies that created it, in particular, have put our aspirations of “justice for all” 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.

Spending on prisons has increased while other services have been cut.



Significant racial disparities exist in incarceration in Massachusetts





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

Gretchen Van Ness: I am fortunate that my parents never tried to whitewash my childhood. I knew that the National Guard killed students at Kent State, the NYS police killed prisoners at Attica, and the police bombed and killed MOVE members in Philadelphia. I have never had any illusions about the inequities that affect and afflict every institution in our society and every aspect of our lives. I have also never had any illusions about the hard work it will take to uproot these inequities and heal these injustices. This is the work I have always and will always be committed to. Change can only come when we have difficult conversations across our differences. I have always and will always work to create space for these conversations to take place, and to move from conversation to action.

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

Gretchen Van Ness: As both an activist and an attorney, I have worked to combat discrimination and harassment based on race, gender, religion, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, age, ethnicity, gender identity, and marital status both representing individuals who have experienced such discrimination and harassment, and advocating for changes in the law. One of my cases led to a federal circuit court decision that held that discrimination on the basis of perceived disability, not just actual disability, is prohibited under Title VII. I am currently part of a racism conversation group in Hyde Park that is working to heal long-standing wounds and divisions in our community.

3. *Trans Accommodations. In 2016, Massachusetts passed legislation to prevent discrimination against transgender individuals in public accommodations. Conservatives are seeking to repeal the bill on the 2018 ballot. Will you advocate for the protection of this legislation?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

4. *LGBTQ Youth. Our neighboring states of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Vermont ban the use of harmful conversion therapy practices for minors. Do you support banning the use of conversion therapy in Massachusetts?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

5. **Mandatory Minimums.** *The landmark criminal justice reform bill passed earlier this year eliminated or reduced a number of mandatory minimums for drug-related offenses; however, it left in place, or expanded, those related to opioids. The opioid crisis in Massachusetts is severe, but it will not be solved by doubling down on criminalization. Do you support eliminating mandatory minimums for opioid drug offenses?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

6. **Juvenile Justice -- Part I.** *Ample research shows that teenage offenders served by a juvenile system are much less likely to re-offend and more likely to successfully transition to adulthood. Teenagers in a juvenile system have access to greater educational and counseling services, and they're much less likely to face sexual assault than at an adult facility. Do you support raising the age of criminal majority from 18 to 19?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

7. **Juvenile Justice -- Part II.** *Under Massachusetts law, if a high school senior and a high school sophomore have sex – with mutual consent – the senior could be punished by incarceration and then forced to register as a sex offender. In recent years, states have been passing so-called "Romeo and Juliet" laws out of a recognition that such cases only get prosecuted when a parent disapproves of their child's relationship. Do you support the elimination of the charge of statutory rape for consensual sex between youths who are close in age (See H.3065)?*

Gretchen Van Ness: I support this concept in general but would want to read more about the specifics of implementation.

8. **Reducing Recidivism.** *Do you support increasing investment in education and job training programs for the formerly incarcerated?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

9. **Solitary Confinement.** *Do you support limiting the use of solitary confinement to no more than 15 consecutive days, and eliminating the use of solitary confinement for at-risk populations, including pregnant women, LGBTQ people, those with mental illness, and those under age 21 or over age 65?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

10. **Police Accountability.** *Do you support the establishment of an independent review board for police shootings in the Commonwealth?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

11. **Black Lives Matter.** *Since 2016, in response the Black Lives Matter activists' illumination of criminal justice system abuses, conservatives have pushed a myth of a "war on cops." States such as Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, and Kentucky have advanced "Blue Lives Matter" legislation, making law enforcement a protected class under hate crime statutes. In November 2017, the MA Legislature*

followed suit, creating a new “superpenalty” and mandatory minimum for assaulting a police officer. Would you oppose such policies, which would disproportionately punish minority communities and contribute to an overly carceral state?

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

12. **Safe Communities Act.** *Do you support the Safe Communities Act, which prohibits the use of state resources for mass deportations or deportation raids, limits local and state police collaboration with federal immigration agents, and prohibits state support for a Muslim registry?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

13. **Safe Driving Act.** *Would you support the Safe Driving Act, which would remove immigration status as a barrier to applying for a license or learner’s permit?*

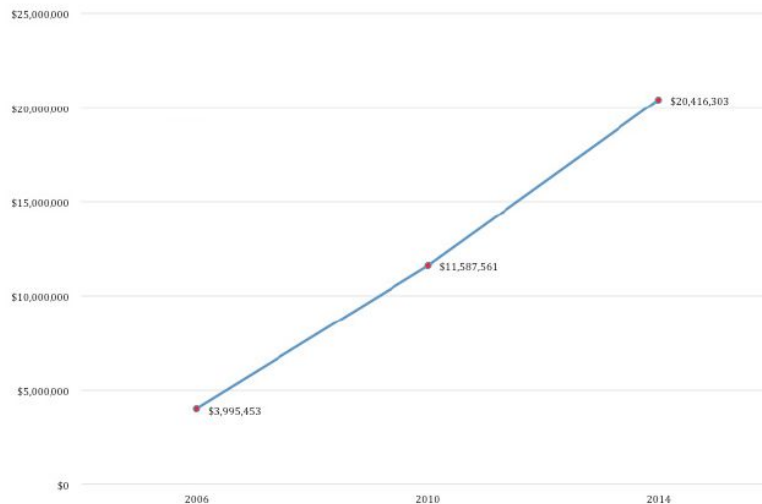
Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

G. GOOD GOVERNMENT/ STRONG DEMOCRACY

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. A strong democracy requires an engaged electorate, but voter turnout in midterm elections, and especially local elections, remains low. Myths about voter fraud are peddled in order to justify voter suppression. 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.

Independent expenditures in MA elections have risen rapidly. (Source: [Common Cause](#))

Figure 1: MA Independent Expenditure Totals



1. *Please share your personal values and principles regarding Good Government and Strong Democracy.*

Gretchen Van Ness: As a constitutional law scholar, I believe in the promise of our founding documents -- a promise that can only be kept if we are willing to do the work of being informed members of our communities, using the power and privilege we have to hold our leaders and each other accountable, and being willing to step up in difficult times. My belief that a more perfect union is possible and that we can save our democracy from those who are working so hard to destroy it today is one of the reasons I'm running for office.

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

Gretchen Van Ness: Most recently, I was part of AVR Lobby Day. I have helped register voters and will continue to do that on the campaign trail. I have also signed the pledge not to accept campaign donations from the fossil fuel industry.

3. **Power and the Legislature.** *If elected, would you support 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?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

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

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

5. **Voting.** *Which of the following policies to increase voter participation do you support?*

a. *Election day voter registration*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

b. *Automatic voter registration*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

c. *Expansion of early voting to “off-year” elections*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

d. *No-fault absentee voting*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

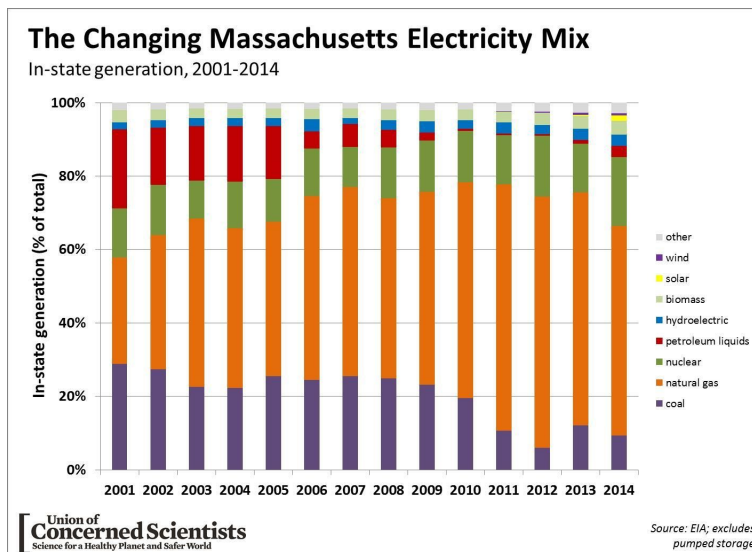
H. SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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. In 2016, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the state has failed to meet its legal obligation to set and enforce annual limits on greenhouse gas emissions as outlined in the 2008 Global Warming Solutions Act. Setting and reaching these goals 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.

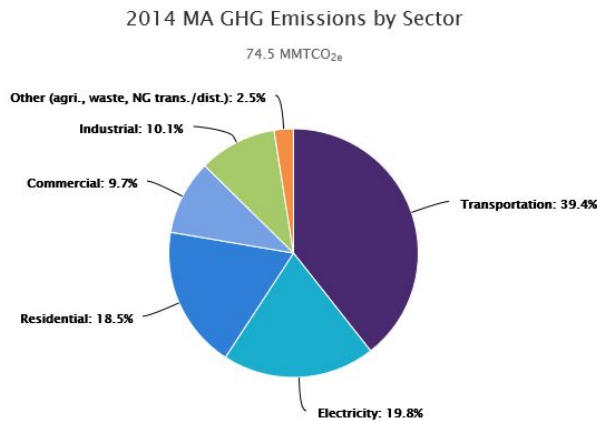
Equity issues loom large, as low-income communities and communities of color are often the most vulnerable to natural disasters and bear the brunt of pollution. In 2014, Governor Deval Patrick signed an executive order directing all state agencies to devote resources to protect the health, safety, and environment for the most vulnerable residents. However, this nominal commitment to “Environmental Justice” has been more rhetorical than real.

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.

Despite recent progress, Massachusetts is still overwhelmingly dependent on fossil fuels.



Transportation is currently the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in MA.



(Source: <http://www.mass.gov>)

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

Gretchen Van Ness: I walked in the first Walk for Water in Rochester, NY in 1970. My family helped establish a recycling center long before curbside recycling existed. I was the volunteer block coordinator in my neighborhood in Jamaica Plain when Boston started curbside recycling. I have been a bike commuter whenever possible and while President of the Hyde Jackson Square Main Street Board, helped install new bike racks in our district made by students at Artists for Humanity. I participate in the annual Neponset River Clean-Up and Keep Hyde Park Beautiful. There is no Planet B, and we must do everything in our power to shift to sustainable practices in every aspect of our lives.

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

Gretchen Van Ness: In addition to the above, I am committed to expanding mass transit in the district and instituting a rational fare structure on the commuter rail.

3. *Waste Reduction. Would you support a statewide ban on single-use shopping bags and a requirement that alternatives be more sustainable?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

4. *Solar energy. Do you support increasing equitable access to solar power by removing caps on solar generation and restoring compensation for low-income and community solar?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

5. *Renewable Energy. Do you support a target of at least 50% clean energy by 2030 for Massachusetts, as adopted in California and New York? (Hawaii is committed to 100% renewables by 2045). To accomplish this, would you support an increase in the Renewable Energy Production Standard (the green energy mandate on utilities) by at least 3% each year?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

6. **Environmental Justice.** *Successive and bipartisan gubernatorial administrations have made verbal commitments to environmental justice (EJ) and Governor Deval Patrick issued an Executive Order on Environmental Justice in 2014 which has not been implemented.*

a. *Would you support implementation of the 2014 EO?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

b. *and support efforts to codify environmental justice into law?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

7. **Gas pipelines.** *Do you oppose the expansion of gas pipelines in the state?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

8. **Carbon pricing.**

a. *Do you support putting a fee on carbon emissions?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

b. *Do you support using some of the revenue from such a fee to invest in **green infrastructure**?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

9. **Public Transit.** *Do you support finding progressive revenue sources to fund the maintenance, expansion, and improvement of the MBTA and the RTAs?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

10. **Regional Transportation Funding.** *Would you support legislation to allow municipalities to place a question on the ballot to raise revenue for local and regional transportation projects?*

Gretchen Van Ness: Yes.

III. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Limit answer to 150 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.

Gretchen Van Ness: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts about so many issues that I care so passionately about. This is an extraordinary moment in history when radical change and a renewed and vibrant democracy are possible. I am honored to be part of this change through my campaign for State Representative, and I would be honored to have your support.