

*Natalie Blais*

**1st Franklin**

**State Representative**

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*Endorsement Questionnaire*

**Office Sought:** State Representative

**Legislative District:** 1st Franklin

**Party:** Democratic

**Website:** [www.BlaisForMA.org](http://www.BlaisForMA.org)

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

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/BlaisForMA/>



**Primary:** September 4

**Election:** November 6

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# Introduction: Progressive Mass

## About

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*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](https://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

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*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](https://massbudget.org)).*

# I. About the Candidate

## Natalie Blais

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

**Natalie Blais:** As State Representative for the First Franklin District, I intend to fight for strong, healthy, connected communities.

#### STRONG COMMUNITIES

##### Education

LET'S SUPPORT OUR LOCAL K-12 SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTIONS OF PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION.

Massachusetts has a national reputation as “the education state.” Time and again, the Commonwealth is recognized for the emphasis it places on K-12 education. Indeed, states across the nation look to us as a model. But schools in our rural areas are suffering from an outdated Chapter 70 funding formula and the state’s decision not to reimburse 100% of school transportation costs. Let’s work together to ensure that our schools are properly funded. While addressing school funding, let’s fight for the funding to reimburse our towns for the full costs of school transportation. In a state known nationally for its commitment to K-12 education, we cannot fail the children who live in our most rural areas.

And as a Commonwealth, let’s look beyond our K-12 system. Our children deserve quality, affordable higher education right here in Massachusetts. They deserve community colleges and a flagship university that will carry them to the next level. Let’s commit to investing in higher education to attract and retain the young people who will meet the workforce needs of local businesses and industries across the state.

##### Economic Development

LET'S GROW OUR LOCAL ECONOMY AND SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESSES.

86% of all MA firms have 19 employees or less, and 458,000 are sole proprietorships. Many of these businesses are located right here in western Massachusetts including local artists and farmers, manufacturers and restaurant owners, small retail shops and tourist destinations. As a region, we value local by buying local...every day. Let’s identify the solutions to support the small businesses in our region and ensure that leaders in Boston know what we need to succeed.

##### Climate Change

LET'S FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE TOGETHER AND MAKE THE CRITICAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION AND ENERGY.

When we build affordable housing, let’s build it to the highest energy efficiency standards possible. Let’s place a premium on increasing the energy efficiency of our old New England housing stock. Let’s adopt energy efficient transportation facilities and equipment whenever feasible. And finally, let’s make sure the Commonwealth is a national leader in promoting clean energy jobs and renewable energy technology.

#### HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

## Agriculture

### LET'S PRESERVE OUR LOCAL FARMS.

Our local farms protect the charm and beauty of our landscape and provide us with healthy, local food. Let's support them by funding infrastructure, such as the Franklin County CDC's cold storage facility; by promoting agritourism; by incentivizing the diversification of farm products to include cheese, yogurt, beer and cider; and by protecting our farmland through the Agricultural Preservation Restriction program and other efforts. Let's continue the success of the Healthy Incentives Program, which benefits local farms and our neighbors who need assistance.

## Sustainable Safety Nets

### LET'S SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER.

We have all chosen to live in western Massachusetts for different reasons. For some of us, there are no barriers to success or quality of life. We have what we need, or can get it. But living in a rural area can present challenges for some. And being part of a small community means looking out for one another. Let's work together to fight for transportation, affordable housing, healthcare, veteran services and other safety-net programs that support all of our neighbors.

## Affordable and Accessible Healthcare

### LET'S ADVOCATE FOR AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE HEALTHCARE FOR ALL.

We are extremely lucky in Massachusetts to have one of the most comprehensive healthcare programs in the nation, but in rural western Massachusetts access can be a challenge. Let's keep our local hospitals and community health centers strong and expand the use of telemedicine whenever feasible.

## CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

### Broadband

### LET'S CONTINUE THE FIGHT FOR LAST MILE BROADBAND ACCESS BUT LOOK TO A FUTURE WITH BROADBAND TO DRIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

I will continue the fight to bring last mile broadband connections to all communities in western Massachusetts. Choosing to live and work in one of the most beautiful areas of the Commonwealth doesn't mean we should be locked out of broadband access. And when we get broadband, I will hold community conversations in all 19 towns to hear your ideas for how we can leverage state resources to create jobs and attract entrepreneurs and small businesses to our region.

## Transportation Infrastructure

### LET'S BE THE VOICE FOR RURAL TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE.

Transportation funding in rural Massachusetts is critically important, particularly for regional transit authorities and for programs like the MA Small Bridges program. Our rural transportation system will never compare or compete with the numbers served in urban centers, but that doesn't mean we need it any less. In fact, we need it more. Without public transportation, many people in Franklin County cannot access the jobs and services needed to support their families. We cannot let this vital service go un-funded.

## Supporting our Small Towns

### LET'S WORK TOGETHER AND FIND OUR STRENGTH IN NUMBERS.

Our small towns and non-profit agencies often do not have the resources to access state and federal funds. My office will be a resource for local town boards and I will place a premium on constituent services for individuals, non-profits and local businesses. Together we will make the connections with agencies in Boston and in Washington so we can continue to grow the capacity of our towns and our

neighbors.

**2. *What prepares you to serve in this capacity?***

**Natalie Blais:** As Economic Development Director for Congressman John Olver; constituent services and special projects manager for Congressman Jim McGovern; Chief of Staff for the Chancellor of UMass Amherst; and Executive Director of the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, I have hands on experience advancing the priorities of the region.

I will hit the ground running as your State Representative at a time when the region needs experience on Beacon Hill.

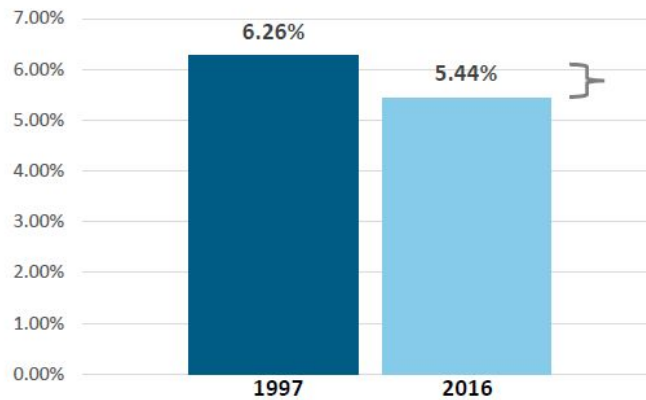
For the last decade, I have listened closely to the voices of our communities and have established relationships with local, state and federal officials; community leaders; nonprofits and businesses. I will use these connections to ensure that our voices are heard in Boston and Washington, D.C.

# 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.

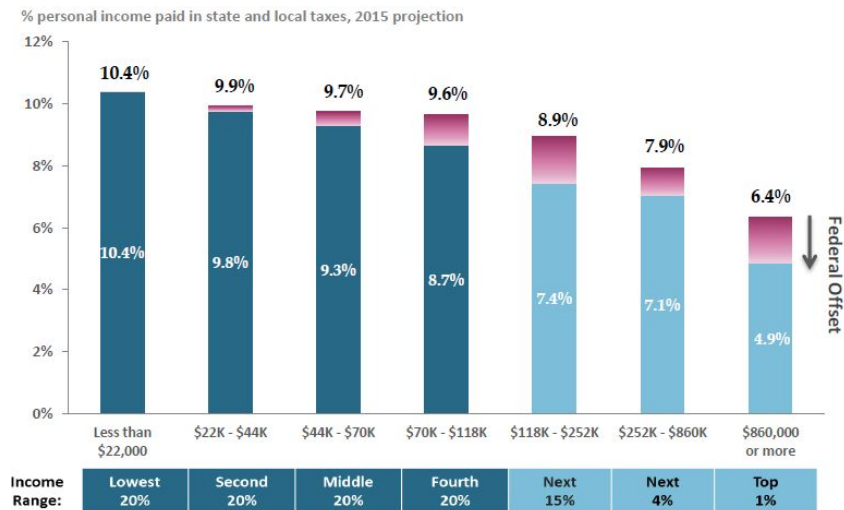
**Declining revenues have meant drastic cuts, limiting our ability to invest in our communities and future economic stability.**

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?*

**Natalie Blais:** According to the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, “Massachusetts is among just eight states with flat income tax structures” and the top 1% pay the smallest share of income in state and local taxes. I support the Fair Share Amendment to generate revenue to invest in education and transportation.

I support protecting the Earned income Tax Credit to help working families. I would also support regional ballot initiatives that would allow a municipality or a group of municipalities to raise funding for specific transportation projects.

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.).*
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?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.



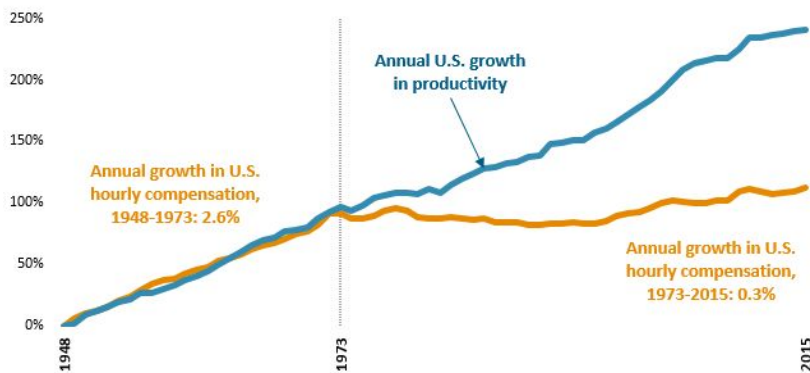
## B. JOB GROWTH AND THE ECONOMY

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

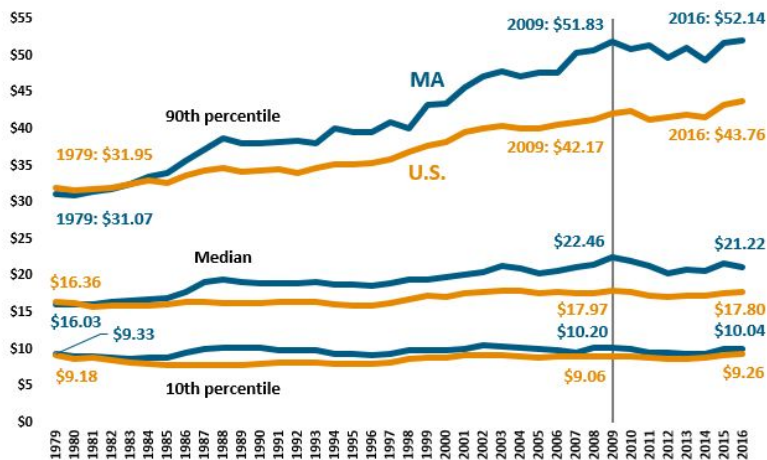
Cumulative Change in U.S. Hourly Wages for Private-Sector Production/Non-Supervisory Workers and Net Productivity, 1948-2015



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?*

**Natalie Blais:** One of our top priorities in the Commonwealth and nation should be to reduce income inequality. We must address the gap between the rich and poor in our nation. The Fair Share Amendment will help to address the inequity but there are additional steps we can take to increase the economic security of all people. The minimum wage must be raised to \$15 an hour while also protecting our small businesses that form the backbone of our economy. Paid family medical leave will help to ensure that workers are not forced to choose between a job and taking care of someone they love.

As a State Representative, I would support a comprehensive bill to fight climate change while growing clean energy jobs and training programs. The 2017 Massachusetts Clean Energy Industry Report reported that the clean energy sector expanded to more than 109,000 jobs between 2016 and 2017. The industry also contributed \$11.4 billion to Massachusetts' Gross State Product, representing 2.3% of the Massachusetts economy. Massachusetts can lead the nation in clean energy jobs and should adopt a clear path forward to do just that.

**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.).

**3. Increasing Wages.**

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

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

**d. Teen Minimum Wage.** And reject efforts to create a subminimum wage for teen workers?

**Natalie Blais:** No.

Regarding the sub-minimum wage: There is great deal of discussion in our region about this topic. I'd be interested in discussing this more with constituents before forming an opinion.

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

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

5. **Unions -- Part I.** *If workers in Massachusetts make the decision to unionize, would you be willing to publicly support a union-organizing drive and discourage management from fighting their decision?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes. I support workers' rights to organize.

6. **Unions -- Part II.** *Since 2010 election, a number of states have rolled back the collective bargaining rights of public workers as part of a well-funded, nationwide assault on unions led by wealthy, conservative donors. Would you oppose any effort to roll back the collective bargaining rights of state or municipal employees?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

7. **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?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

8. **Mandatory Arbitration.** *Would you support legislation to prohibit the use of mandatory arbitration provisions in employment contracts, i.e., requirements that an employee forfeit the right to sue the employer for discrimination, nonpayment of wages or other illegal conduct?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

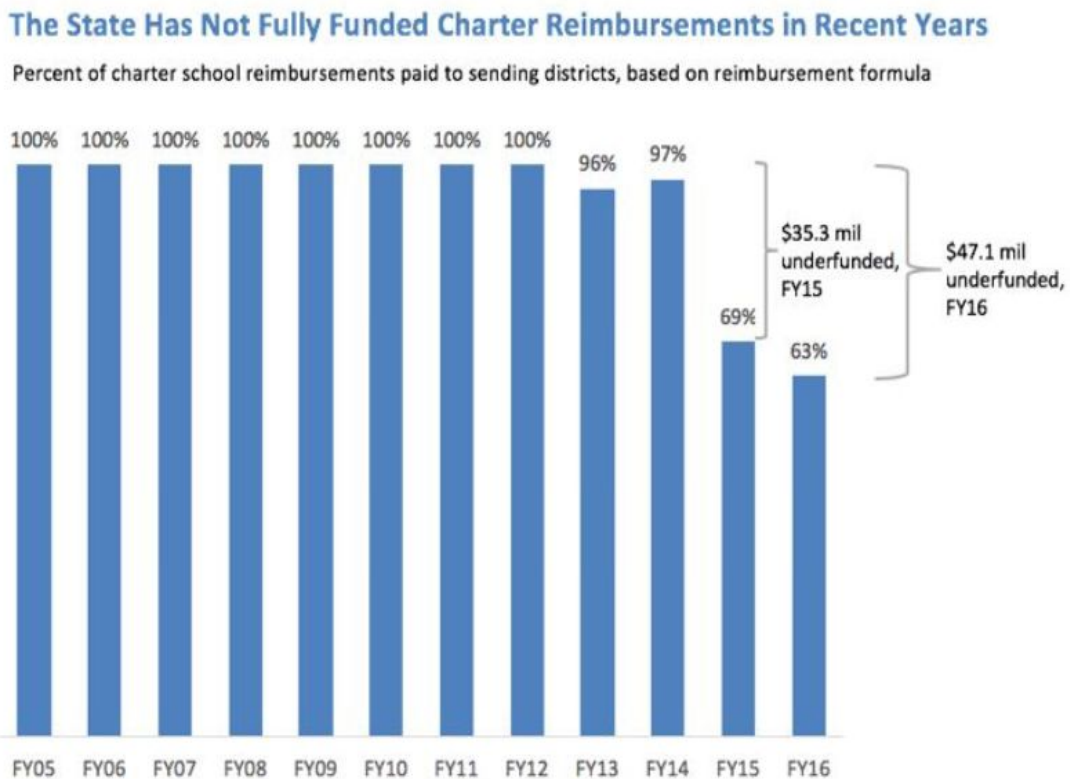
9. **Economic Democracy.** *Would you support legislation to foster and develop employee ownership of businesses in Massachusetts and encourage the formation of cooperatives and/or benefit corporations?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

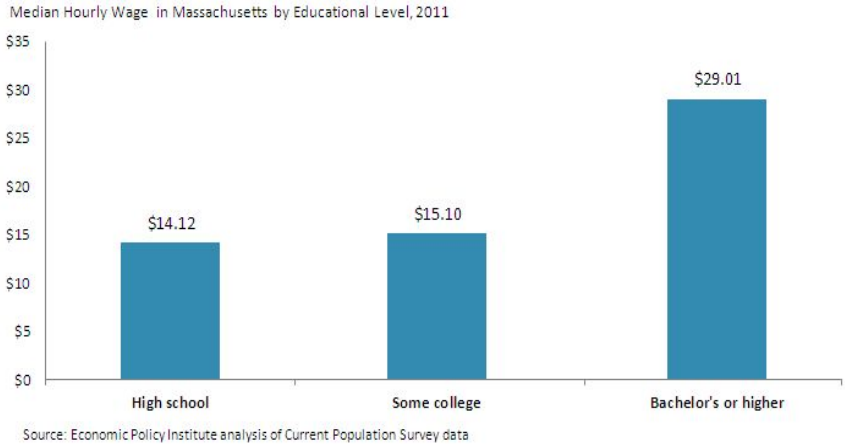
## C. EDUCATION

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.**

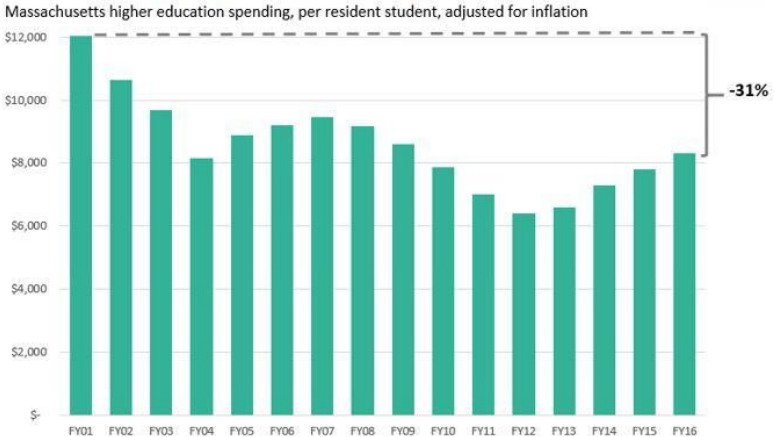


**Higher educational attainment leads to higher wages.**



**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?*

**Natalie Blais:** Massachusetts has a national reputation as “the education state.” Time and again, the Commonwealth is recognized for the emphasis it places on K-12 education. Indeed, states across the nation look to us as a model. But schools in our rural areas are suffering from an outdated Chapter 70 funding formula and the state’s decision not to reimburse 100% of school transportation costs. Let’s work together to ensure that our schools are properly funded. While addressing school funding, let’s fight for the funding to reimburse our towns for the full costs of school transportation. Let’s put a cap on charter schools and allow parents to opt out of high stakes testing. In a state known nationally for its commitment to K-12 education, we cannot fail the children who live in our most rural areas.

And as a Commonwealth, let’s look beyond our K-12 system. Our children deserve quality, affordable higher education right here in Massachusetts. They deserve community colleges and a flagship university that will carry them to the next level. Let’s commit to investing in higher education to attract and retain the young people who will meet the workforce needs of local businesses and industries across the state.

2. *Optional/As Applicable: Please indicate work you personally have done to advance your principles on public education?*
3. *Universal Pre-K. Would you support creating universal, free Pre-K, accessible to any resident of Massachusetts, integrated into the public school system?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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?*

**Natalie Blais:** 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?*

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

7. **Sex Education.** *Do you support requiring public schools that teach sexual health education to provide age-appropriate, medically accurate information that is inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities that hat includes the effective use of contraception?*

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

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

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

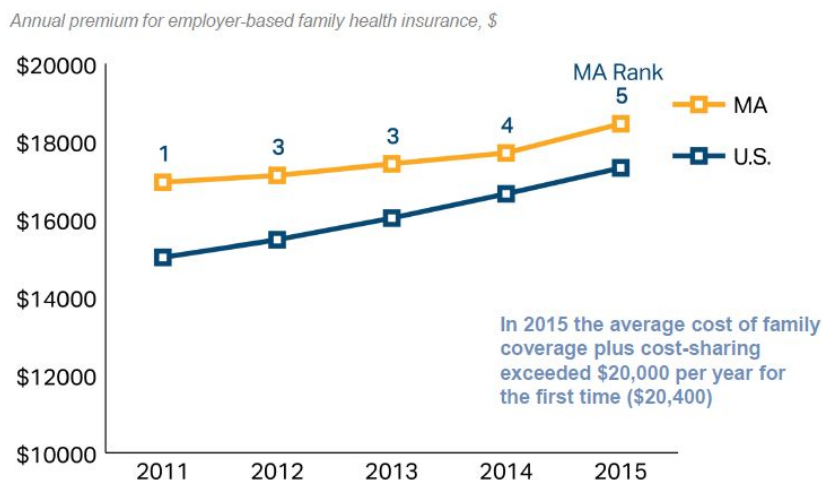
9. **Tuition-Free Higher Education.** *Would you support making tuition free at public colleges and universities?*

**Natalie Blais: Yes.** Every student should have the opportunity to attend college without being saddled with debt. Higher education increases opportunity and improves our society and economy as a whole. However, tuition-free higher education requires an investment in our public colleges and universities that the Commonwealth has, in recent history, been reluctant to provide. Tuition and fees have increased while state support has declined. According to the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, “Massachusetts cut public support by roughly \$335 million between FY 2002 and FY 2013 (adjusted for inflation). Tuition and fees roughly doubled over the same timeframe.” It is absolutely critical to the economic future of our Commonwealth for us to invest in our students and in public higher education and as a State Representative, I will fight for this investment.

## 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.*

**Natalie Blais:** Healthcare is a right for all people. Massachusetts has led the way in providing near universal health insurance coverage but we should aspire to single payer healthcare.

2. *Optional/As Applicable: Please indicate work you personally have done to advance your principles on health care (legislation, community work, published writings, etc.).*
3. *Single Payer. Would you support legislation to enact a single payer health care system in*



Massachusetts?

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

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

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

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?*

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

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?*

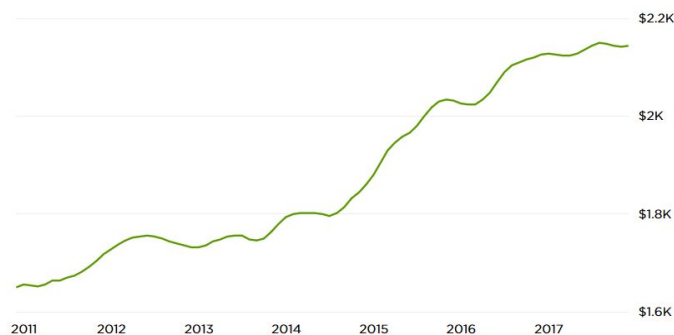
**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

## E. HOUSING

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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?*

**Natalie Blais:** Working for Congressman John Olver, we fought to break down the barriers between housing, energy and transportation. Affordable housing should be built to the most energy efficient standards possible with zero net energy being the goal. We cannot saddle families who are already struggling with additional debt. Affordable housing should also be built along public transportation lines so that individuals are able to access the goods and services that they need.

Our state has some of the oldest housing stock in the nation. Our population in western Massachusetts is getting older at the same time it is declining. In order to attract young families to the region, we need to find a way to install energy efficiency measures and renewable energy technology in these homes so that they are affordable to maintain. Incentivizing these improvements would not only draw homeowners to the region but also fuel jobs in the clean energy sector.

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

3. **Funding.** Do you support increasing funding for

a. The creation of new units of affordable housing, especially low-income units?

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

b. The Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program?

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

c. Matching funds for the Community Preservation Act (via fees from the Registry of Deeds)?

**Natalie Blais: 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?

**Natalie Blais: No.**

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

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

6. **Tenant Protections.** Would you support legislation, such as the Jim Brooks Stabilization Act, that requires landlords to provide a reason when seeking to evict a tenant, like failure to pay rent, damaging property, or breaking a lease; informs tenants of their rights under state law; and increases data collection on eviction?

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

7. **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?

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

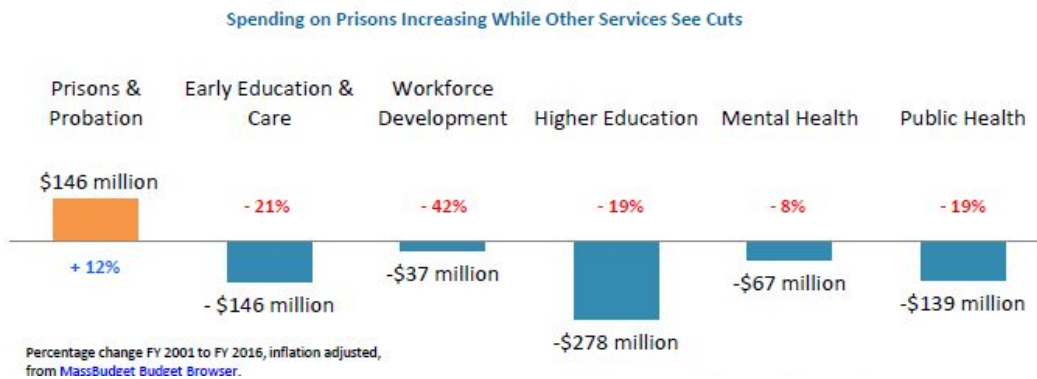
8. **Combating Speculation.** Would you support legislation to allow cities and towns to impose a graduated tax on private real estate transactions over \$2.5 million, with the money allocated to affordable housing trust funds?

**Natalie Blais: Yes.** I'd like to learn more about this before forming an opinion.

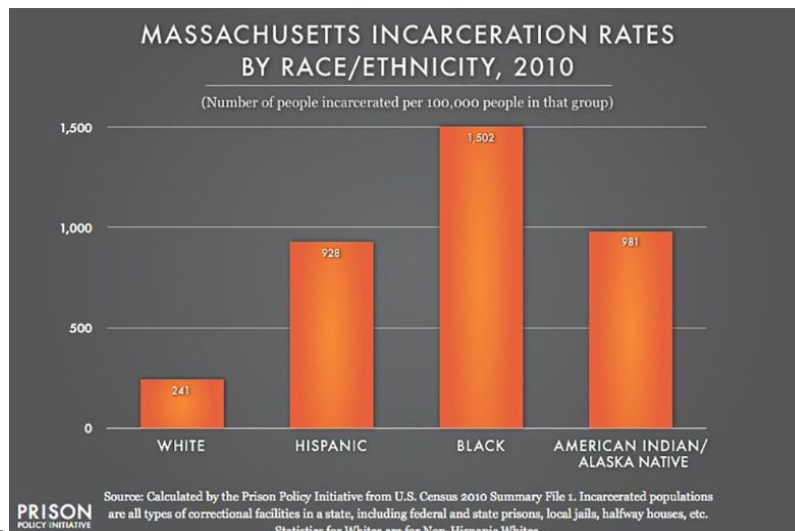
# F. RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

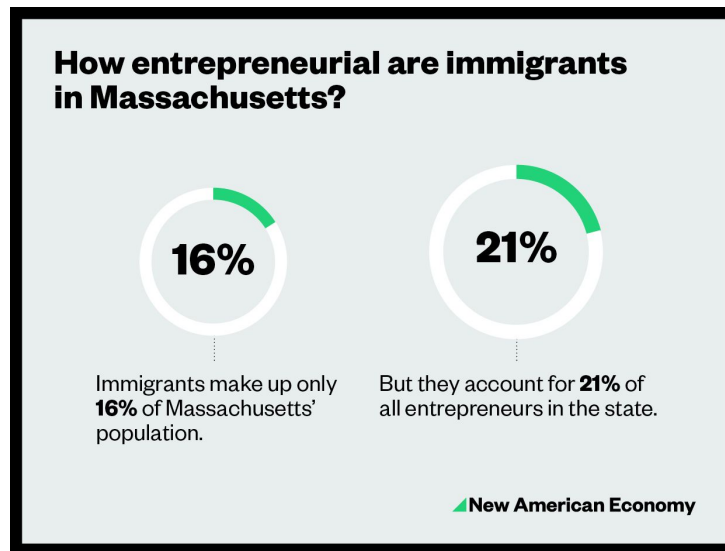
Massachusetts must continue to strive to be a state that welcomes and embraces all of its residents and combats prejudice and discrimination of all kinds. The social and economic costs of mass incarceration and the policies that created it, in particular, have put our aspirations of “justice for all”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

**Natalie Blais:** Government can do good: It can lead the fight against climate change; increase access to affordable housing and public transportation; invest in public education and protect vulnerable populations. We must eliminate the influence of corporations in elections and eliminate barriers to voting whenever possible. As a former staffer for two Congressman who strongly valued constituent services, I understand the importance of listening to ALL constituents and bringing ALL stakeholders together to achieve a common goal.

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

**Natalie Blais:** 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?*

**Natalie Blais:** 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?*

**Natalie Blais:** I would want to discuss this question with Opioid Task Force before forming an

opinion.

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 21?

**Natalie Blais:** 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 for reference)?

**Natalie Blais:** I would like to learn more about this issue before forming an opinion.

8. **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?

**Natalie Blais:** Yes. I believe that solitary confinement is an inhumane measure and ultimately should be eliminated entirely. In the meantime, it should absolutely be restricted as described above, and should require higher standards of justification for its use at any point.

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

**Natalie Blais:** I would want to understand the effectiveness of existing independent review boards in other states before making a decision.

10. **Militarization of Police.** Under the federal 1033 program, the US Department of Defense can transfer excess military equipment to local police departments. Such equipment makes police forces look like occupying armies and exacerbates the impact of overpolicing in communities of color. Meanwhile, communities are often left in the dark about the equipment that local police departments are acquiring. Would you support, at minimum, a requirement that local elected officials vote on any such transfer before it can take place?

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

11. **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?

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

12. **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?*

**Natalie Blais:** I would appreciate more information on this issue before making a decision.

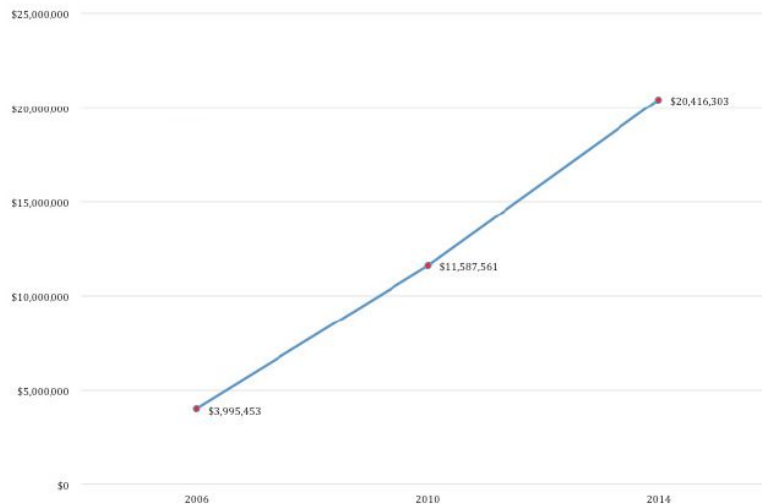
# G. GOOD GOVERNMENT/ STRONG DEMOCRACY

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*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.*

**Natalie Blais:** Government can do good: It can lead the fight against climate change; increase access to affordable housing and public transportation; invest in public education and protect our most vulnerable populations. We must eliminate the influence of corporations in elections and eliminate barriers to voting whenever possible. As a former staffer for two Congressman who strongly valued constituent services, I understand the importance of listening to constituents and bringing stakeholders together to achieve a common goal.

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



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?*

**Natalie Blais:** I will work every day on behalf of the residents of the First Franklin District to ensure their voices are heard. There is a great deal of change currently underway in the composition of the Legislature, particularly in the representation from the Pioneer Valley. I look forward to determining the ways in which I can best serve my constituents as State Representative.

4. **Transparency.** *Massachusetts is one of only two states where the Governor's Office, the Legislature, and the Judiciary claim full exemption from the public records laws. Do you support ending that exemption?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

6. **Candidate Diversity.** *The cost of child care can prove prohibitive to working mothers or fathers seeking to run for office. Would you support legislation to explicitly allow working parents running for office to use campaign funds to pay for childcare while the candidate is "performing work or attending events directly related to the candidate's campaign"?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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

a. *Election day voter registration*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

b. *Automatic voter registration*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

d. *No-fault absentee voting*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

Funding must be provided by the state to municipalities if the Commonwealth decides to move forward with these voting initiatives.

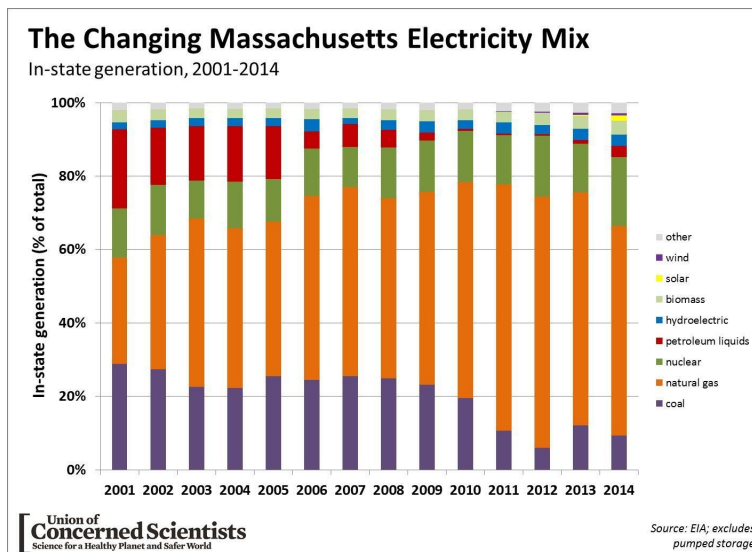
# H. SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

*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.*

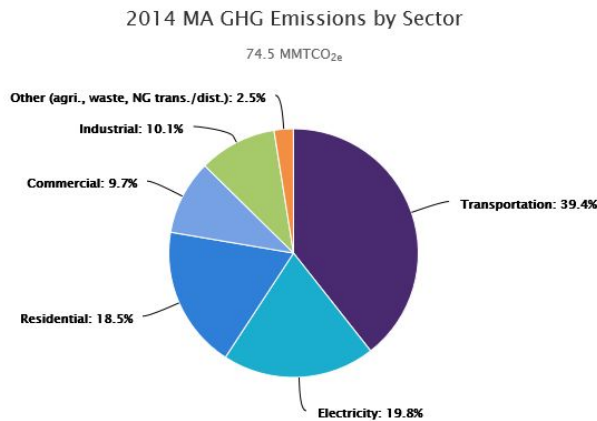
*Equity issues loom large, as low-income communities and communities of color are often the most vulnerable to natural disasters and bear the brunt of pollution. In 2014, Governor Deval Patrick signed an executive order directing all state agencies to devote resources to protect the health, safety, and 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.*

**Natalie Blais:** First, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts should lead by example. If the state is investing in the construction of new facilities, they should be energy efficient or better yet: zero net energy. Old infrastructure should be buttoned up to increase energy efficiency and renewable energy technology should be installed whenever possible. A prioritized list of state-owned land that can be used for solar (MassDOT facilities along highways) should be developed so that when opportunities arise, we have shovel ready projects.

Second, with some of the oldest housing stock in the nation, we must incentivize energy efficiency improvements. This absolutely critical in reducing our dependence on fossil fuels. Special consideration should be given to low-income housing units so that those already struggling to make ends meet are not saddled with high heating and electric bills.

Third, let's diversify our energy portfolio with a real emphasis on renewable energy technology. Eliminating the solar net metering cap and restoring the retail net metering credit for community-shared and low-income solar will help push us towards a successful transition to 100% renewable energy. The recent announcement that Vineyard Wind will construct an 800-megawatt offshore wind facility is an exciting step in diversifying our energy portfolio and developing clean energy jobs. Finally, the Commonwealth should lead the way in developing battery storage technology to harness solar and wind power.

Fourth, let's invest in public transportation. Public transit is the only option for some to get to work, school, the grocery store and healthcare appointments. Chronically underfunding Regional Transit Agencies leaves them with only two choices to make ends meet: raise fares and/or reduce service. As a result, those most in need suffer. We must invest in public transportation service and in electric buses whenever feasible. Coupled with enhanced rail service, the adoption of electric vehicles (EV), EV charging stations and the expansion of bike paths, we can begin to address transportation emissions.

Finally, let's adopt a comprehensive energy plan that fuels our economy. The 2017 Massachusetts Clean Energy Industry Report reported that the clean energy sector expanded to more than 109,000 jobs between 2016 and 2017. The industry also contributed \$11.4 billion to Massachusetts' Gross State Product, representing 2.3% of the Massachusetts economy. Massachusetts can lead the nation in clean

energy jobs and should adopt a clear path forward to do just that.

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

**Natalie Blais:** As the Economic Development Director for Congressman John Olver, I advanced projects in the region including geothermal and solar installations at Greenfield Community College, zero net energy affordable housing, the expansion of a network of bike paths throughout the Pioneer Valley, and access to public transportation. Two of the projects I am most proud of are the Holyoke Transportation Center, which co-located Headstart, Holyoke Community College and the PVTa and the expansion of rail service along the Connecticut River line to restore Amtrak service to Greenfield and Northampton.

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

**Natalie Blais:** 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?*

**Natalie Blais:** 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?*

**Natalie Blais:** 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?*

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

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

**Natalie Blais:** Yes.

8. **Carbon pricing.**

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

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

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

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

9. **Public Utilities.** *Would you support legislation to allow municipalities to purchase their electric distribution utility (the poles and wires that transmit power) and operate a municipal or cooperative electric utility?*

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

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

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**

11. **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?*

**Natalie Blais: Yes.**