

Nika Elugardo

15th Suffolk

State Representative

Endorsement Questionnaire

Office Sought: State Representative

Legislative District: 15th Suffolk

Party: Democratic

Website: www.electnika.com

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

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/nikaforrep/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/electnika/>

Primary: September 4

Election: November 6



Contents

- Primary: September 4** **0**
- Election: November 6** **0**
- Introduction: Progressive Mass** **2**
 - About 2
 - Membership 2
 - How Endorsements Work 2
 - Sources 2
- I. About the Candidate** **3**
 - Nika Elugardo 3
- II. THE ISSUES** **5**
 - A. REVENUE AND TAXATION 5
 - B. JOB GROWTH AND THE ECONOMY 8
 - C. EDUCATION 12
 - D. HEALTH CARE 17
 - E. HOUSING 20
 - F. RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE 24
 - G. GOOD GOVERNMENT/
STRONG DEMOCRACY 29
 - H. SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION 32
- III. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** **37**

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

Nika Elugardo

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

Nika Elugardo: I am running because I love my district. I've lived here for nearly 15 years. For too long the social justice values of my diverse district have not been reflected in our representation at the State House. I am a strong progressive leader who values the genius and experience of our constituents and who will not wait for permission from House leadership to fight for what our constituents believe is right. From my personal upbringing to my training to my more than two decades of experience in community and economic development, I will bring policy solutions to the legislative table that represent the best of our advocates and communities and that release the power of the most marginalized in our community. I will make sure the voices of those most impacted are "at the table."

My top three priorities are quality and relevant education for all, accessible and single-payer health care for all, and safe, affordable housing for all. These priorities stem from my commitment to permanently closing the race- and gender-based wealth gaps. Each of these areas are impacted by structural racism, intergenerational poverty, and persistent sexism. On the other hand, each of these areas can benefit from tested policy that has been shown to reduce long-term disparities.

A comprehensive legislative plan for social justice must include education, health care, and housing at its core to sustain a long-term impact. I have a policy agenda that makes connections between and among issues. I know that we can provide access to educational opportunities that fulfill students' potential and provide opportunities to rewarding, economically sustaining career paths. Without quality health care and adequate housing, even the best education and workforce development efforts will fall flat. Social justice in other essential areas, such as immigration, issues of public transportation and mobility, and the environment, are leveraged by progress in our top three. I am running as a champion of single-payer, Medicare for All healthcare reform. I am proud that Mass-Care (Massachusetts Campaign for Single-Payer Health Care), and their board composed of leaders from organizations such as: Mass Alliance, Mass Nurses Association, AFL-CIO, SEIU and others, recently voted to endorse my candidacy. (more details on Mass-Care board found here: <https://www.masscare.org/leadership>).

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

Nika Elugardo: I have more than 20 years of experience in community and economic development with public, private, and nonprofit leaders and communities of color. My professional career helping nonprofit and business leaders work together to break down injustice and open doors to opportunity began at the National Consumer Law Center in Boston. I later became founding Director of MassSaves, an economic justice collaborative jointly sponsored by community organizations, financial institutions, and then-Treasurer Steve Grossman. Most recently, I founded the research and consulting departments at the Emmanuel Gospel Center. These departments developed breakthrough models and fostered collaboration in education, youth development and violence prevention, gender justice, and anti-trafficking in Boston and beyond.

We need a change on Beacon Hill. We need to change what we do, how we do it, and how we measure our results. We require comprehensive legislative solutions with ongoing monitoring and assessment. At BU Law I trained on this type of legislative development under renowned thinkers on evidenced-based legislation. It is my work with them as a student and as a faculty fellow that ultimately brought me to work at the State House as Senior Policy Advisor to Sonia Chang-Díaz.

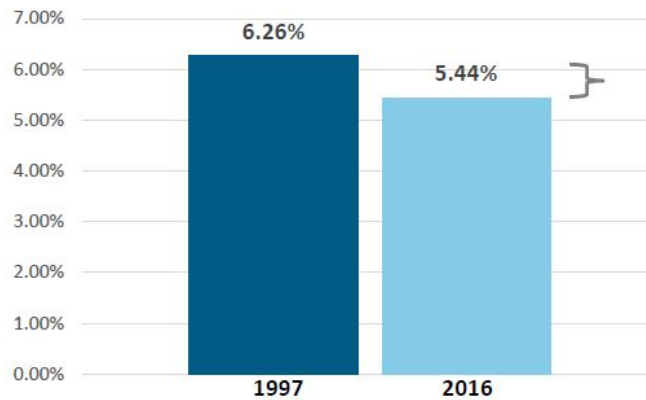
My work experience, my training as a lawyer and policy leader including formal education (B.S. from MIT in Urban Planning, MPP from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and J.D. from Boston University Law School with externships in tax law, human rights, and corporate social responsibility) , my progressive values, and my passion for our District position me to be an effective leader on Beacon Hill.

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.

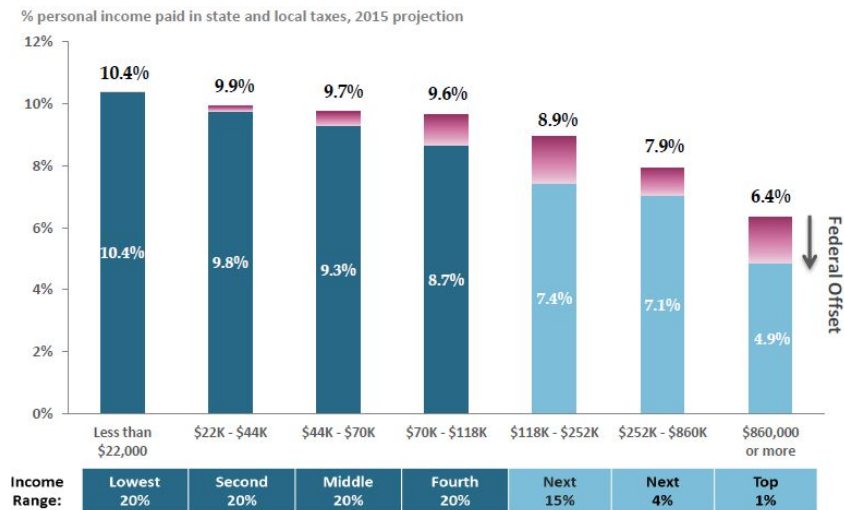
Declining revenues have meant drastic cuts, limiting our ability to invest in our communities and future economic stability.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: I will support and advocate for progressive tax reform that supports the needs of low- and moderate-income individuals, families, and communities. Over \$3 billion in tax revenue is lost each year due to conservative tax cuts. We need to fully fund public services that create opportunity for all, such as education, health care and public transit.

I support the Fair Share Amendment. If Fair Share doesn't pass, I will support alternative progressive sources of new revenue especially (but not exclusively) in my campaign policy priority areas of public education, affordable housing, and quality (single-payer) healthcare. I will review the tax breaks we give wealthy corporations; we should not be giving tax breaks to corporations such as GE while ignoring the small- and medium-sized businesses that create jobs. I would advocate for freezing automatic reductions in the state income tax; the remaining scheduled annual reductions to 5.0 percent will cost the state approximately \$400 million yearly. Progressive tax reform is an essential tool in addressing the larger issue of growing income inequality.

I would support the municipalities in my district (Boston and Brookline) in rethinking the voluntary PILOT program. Boston nonprofits paid \$15M less than requested through PILOT. Wealthy nonprofits with large endowments and/or highly-paid executives should be made to comply with PILOT; small, grassroots organizations should remain fully tax exempt.

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.).*

Nika Elugardo: In law school, I studied taxation as a mechanism for corporate transparency and justice. I also externed at the State House researching the constitutional, political, and legislative history of efforts to amend the state constitution to allow for progressive taxation.

As a Senior Policy Advisor to Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz I tracked advocacy research, particularly from Mass Budget and Policy, to ensure understanding of the impacts of tax related legislation on the progressiveness of the overall MA taxation system

As an activist and advocate, I have participated in the work of Raise Up Massachusetts by attending rallies, distributing literature, and collecting signatures.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. Progressive taxation is an essential component of justice, spreading out the cost of public services across our residents according to what their income can bear. It's important to take into account the many factors impacting the overall progressiveness or regressiveness of our taxation system, including the variety of taxes, deductions, credits, and loopholes available in the code that effectively favor families with high value assets or incomes, and large corporations.

Progressive taxation is also key to racial justice, as tax loopholes often deepen historic,

multi-generational wealth gaps. In Boston this wealth gap is clearly documented by data that shows the net worth of households: non-immigrant African-American households have a net worth of \$8; whites, \$247,500; Caribbean Blacks, \$12,000; Puerto Ricans, \$3,020; and \$0 for Dominicans. Progressive tax policy paired with affordable housing, high quality education, and single-payer healthcare can work to reduce income inequality and wealth gaps.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. Not only do these gimmicks not serve their purpose, but they primarily favor those affluent consumers with flexibility to spend whenever they like.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: 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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. It does us no good to offer tax incentives to attract jobs that don't pay a living wage and that leave workers dependent on state aid and subsidies.

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

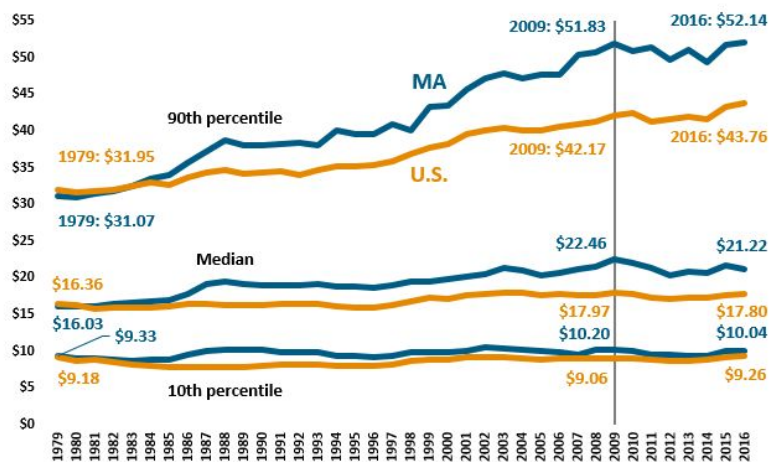
Cumulative Change in U.S. Hourly Wages for Private-Sector Production/Non-Supervisory Workers and Net Productivity, 1948-2015



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?

Nika Elugardo: I support the following to grow the number of good jobs across sectors in order to close the wealth gap and reduce income inequality:

- **Single-payer health care** will reduce municipalities' costs while ultimately creating jobs as resources shift from the high cost of care to building affordable housing, public education, and a strong transportation infrastructure.
- **Investment in renewable energy infrastructure** will create middle-class, middle-skills jobs while addressing climate change that disproportionately impacts low-income communities of color.
- **Smart workforce development** includes project-based learning in K-12 (instead of high-stakes testing), demand-based workforce development that partners with industry to train and hire low- and middle-skills workers, and outcomes-based funding that factors in the quality of job creation (salary, benefits, safety, career paths) and not just placement numbers. Fair Share revenues should be used to increase access to tuition-free higher education. Smart workforce development includes supporting women, immigrants, and people of color in the development of small businesses.
- **Unionization**, especially in traditionally low-paying jobs.

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.).*

Nika Elugardo: I have extensive experience in working directly with residents, nonprofits, and businesses in creating the conditions for meaningful job growth and a sustainable economy through the preservation of affordable housing (foreclosure prevention), making utilities affordable, helping low-income consumers develop assets, and developing youth jobs.

At the National Consumer Law Center, I managed statewide foreclosure- prevention project which resulted in saving 88% of homes through eight counseling agencies; as part of this work, I presented at national conferences, conducted national trainings, and gave professional testimony to Congress. Also at the National Consumer Law Center, I developed tools for utilities to analyze consumer data and to calculate eligibility and cost for innovative Percentage of Income Payment Plans. These programs became national models.

As founding Director of MassSaves, an economic justice collaborative jointly sponsored by community organizations, financial institutions, and then-Treasurer Steve Grossman, I oversaw the development of a statewide multi-sector Collaborative for financial education. I led the design and development team for a multiservice website, www.MassSaves.org, and a campaign to connect MA residents to vetted and quality financial education resources, tools, and coaching.

As a Consultant and Founding Director of the Applied Evaluation Systems Department at Emmanuel Gospel Center (EGC), I supported over 200 youth development organizations in outcomes assessment and strategic planning across issue areas including youth jobs.

In my work with Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz, I focused on researching, drafting and advocacy work for

legislative, budget, and policy initiatives in housing, healthcare finance, consumer protection, transportation, elder care, and financial services.

I have often spent my own time doing pro-bono to fill in the gaps where funded programs and services are lacking. For the last 10 years, I have provided pro bono professional coaching, especially to women and immigrants.

3. Increasing Wages.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

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

This is still not a living wage. We need to keep working toward tracking minimum wage to livable standard of income.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes. I would propose that while we support 16 weeks paid family leave, we explore a pathway to 12 months of leave with an additional one to two years at half pay, modeled on policies present in developed nations such as the Netherlands and Sweden, as well as developing nations such as Bulgaria. Other countries also provide a family allowance for school books and vacation for every family, regardless of income. I support this, and the progressive taxation policies that would make it possible.

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?

Nika Elugardo: Yes. All workers have the right to unionize and should be encouraged to do so by their representatives at the legislature. Important sectors where I will join the fight to unionize and protect workers critical to the fabric and functioning of our communities include home caregivers and day care providers, as well as public defenders.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. I would also support legislation to establish a prevailing wage for security offices contracted by state and quasi-public entities, and extend the existing prevailing wage for cleaners to quasi-public agencies like the MBTA.

The standards for workers on public and quasi-public institutions should always be higher than their counterparts in the private sector, as they serve as platforms and indicators on collective contract negotiations. Higher standards in the public and quasi-public sector help improve the working and living conditions of our entire communities

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. Companies that commit wage violations should be held accountable with higher, more deterrent fines and the threat of losing their operating licenses in the event of repeated violations and unsatisfied judgments.

Massachusetts only collects a fraction of unpaid wages. I would devote more resources to regulation and enforcement, including supporting proposals to ensure that companies that outsource work to low-road contractors are held responsible for their violations of workplace laws.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

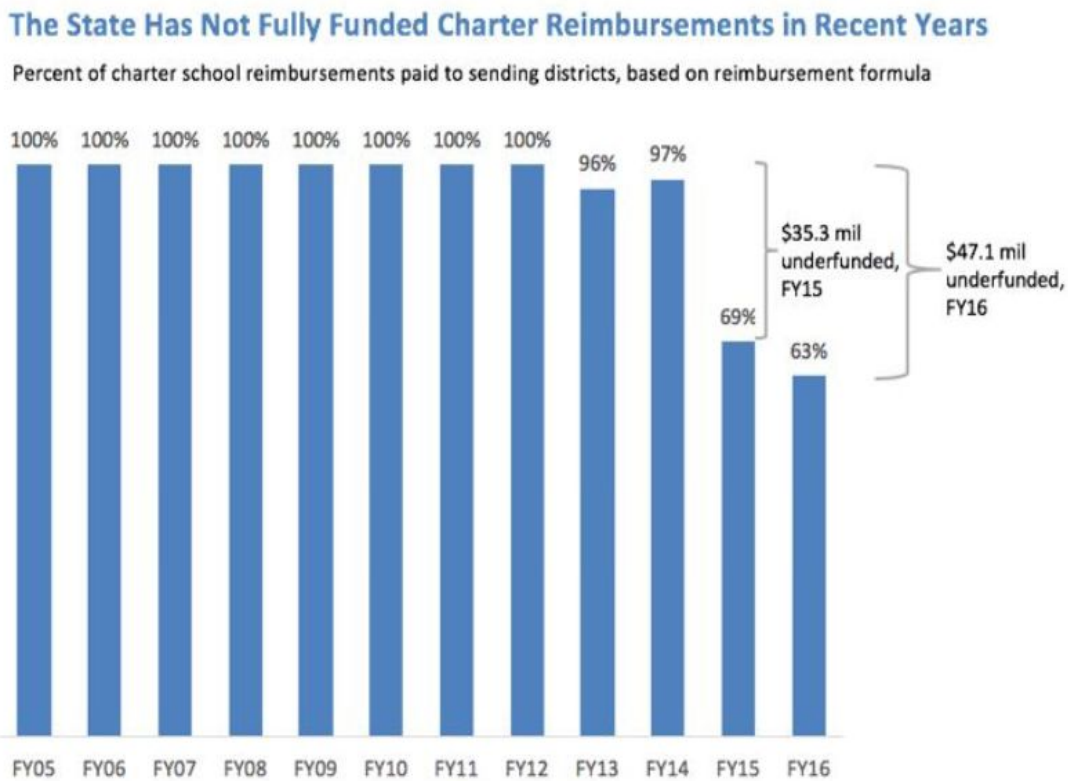
9. **Economic Democracy.** *Would you support legislation to foster and develop employee ownership of businesses in Massachusetts and encourage the formation of cooperatives and/or benefit corporations?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. Co-ops are an important strategy and resource to level the playing field and support a broader diversity in ownership and asset development. Power that is shared has a higher impact on justice, whereas concentrated power works counter to justice. This type of policy is critical to reducing the wealth gap. I will look towards successful examples such as the Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland and the Mondragon Corporation in Spain.

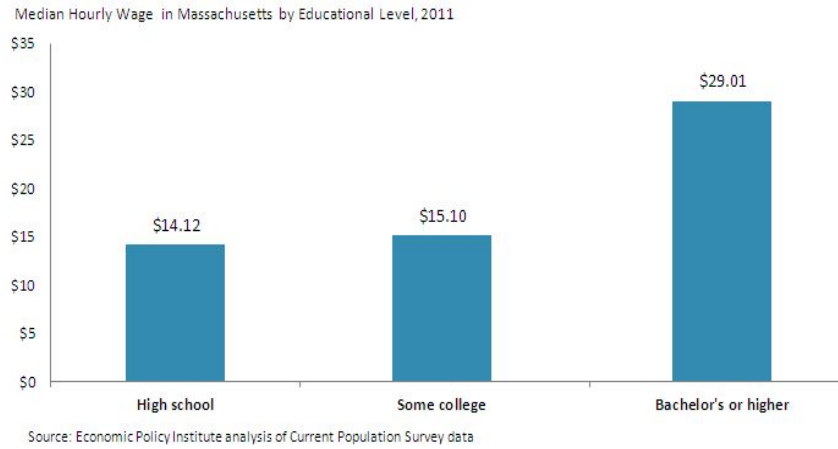
C. EDUCATION

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.

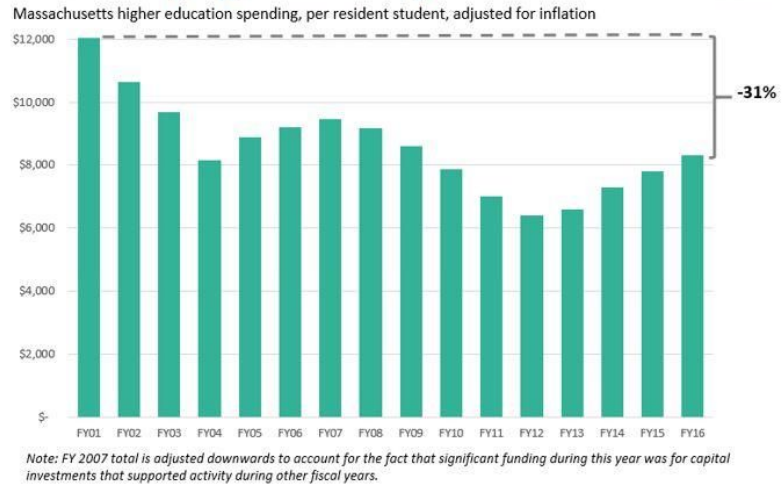


Higher educational attainment leads to higher wages.



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?*

Nika Elugardo: My top priority is fully funding all schools. This means pre-K through higher education, including community colleges and vocational training, and other education opportunities that unlock students' potential and provide rewarding, economically sustaining careers.

Fully funding higher education will help tackle rising student loan debt. According to Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, state cuts to public higher education since 2000 have led to massive growth in average debt for graduates; per-student higher education funding has fallen 32 percent in FY2018 from FY2001 levels. The House's FY18 Budget, which increases total higher education funding by just 1.2 percent, is unacceptable.

I would focus on teacher support at all levels and create career pathways through project-based education and business/academia partnerships in high school and higher education.

I would seek membership on the Joint Committee on Higher Education.

I support a moratorium on high-stakes testing and the rights of parents to opt out of high-stakes testing.

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

Nika Elugardo:

- Advisory Board of Boston's first Big Picture Learning School for project-based education
- Volunteer math tutor for children with behavioral issues in the classroom
- Supported strategic programming for church-school partnerships that serve the needs of schools and low income students
- Taught 7th grade public school students in summer programming to prepare them for successful transition to 8th grade. Department Head for Speech and Writing Program, also taught French (featured in NY Times article), Chemistry, Darkroom Photography and Dance.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes. I support dissemination of Boston Basics (<http://boston.thebasics.org/>) research in schools and medical facilities and other public buildings combined with funding First teacher parent engagement models (<http://www.firstteacherboston.org/>)

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. Our current system of high-stakes testing is hugely problematic and results in a

narrowing of curricula; disproportionately negatively impacts youth who are low-income and/or of color; ignores qualities that help students succeed in education, at home, in the community, and in workplaces; and reduces motivation of students and teachers.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. One key step in fully funding K-12 schools is addressing inequities in the Foundation Budget. The Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center has concluded that almost all low-income school districts lack the resources needed to provide the caliber of education envisioned in the Foundation Budget. Districts with high numbers of students with special needs (such as Boston) are disproportionately impacted by this underfunding. I support Senator Sonia Chang-Díaz's bill, An Act Modernizing the Foundation Budget for the 21st Century (Senate, No. 2506). (I was the Jamaica Plain Liaison and Senior Policy Advisor to Senator Chang-Díaz.) Additionally, I support addressing the inherent inequities in the Municipal Growth Factor. We must pass progressive legislation that accounts for the reality that local taxes are capped due to Proposition 2½.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. Truly public schools are and should be the foundation of our educational system. I voted No on 2. I support prohibiting for-profit charter schools, keeping the cap on charter schools, and fully funding charter reimbursements. Boston Public Schools have lost \$48 million over three years (FY15–FY17) and are projected to lose another \$25 million in FY18.

- 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?*

Nika Elugardo: 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 includes the effective use of contraception?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. My platform has always included ensuring schools provide age-appropriate, culturally competent, medically accurate sex ed.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes. It is unacceptable that our State does not have in-state tuition for all undocumented students. Proposals have been introduced at the State House for over a decade. 18 states have passed it, including Connecticut. All Massachusetts residents deserve a chance at higher

education, regardless of their immigration status. The attack on hard-working immigrants by the federal government does not mean that we should stop fighting for equal rights for our undocumented students.

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

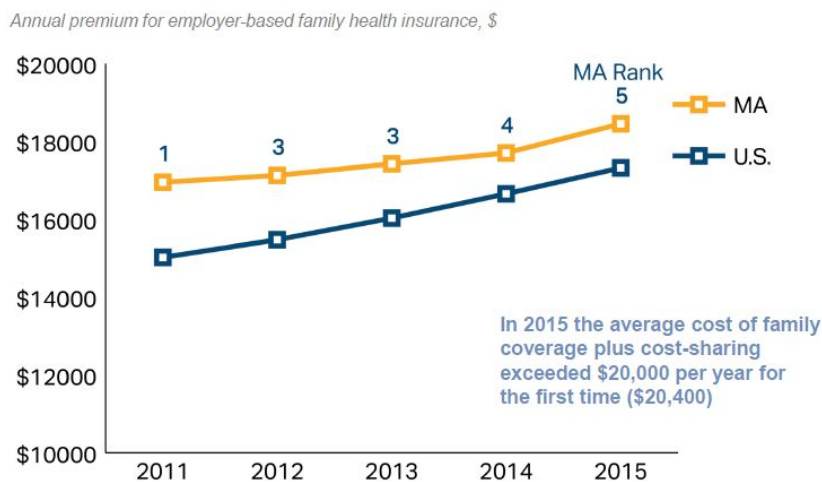
Nika Elugardo: **Yes.** Affordable public higher education is both socially-just policy but also economically smart. Broadening access to higher education will promote economic growth in the Commonwealth and attract greater investment in our well-educated workforce.

An important part of this must be matching education with the needs of employers. 23% of jobs in Massachusetts involve computer science skills, with two-thirds of these jobs in Suffolk and Middlesex Counties. Additionally, Massachusetts employers require a bachelor's degree for over 92% of these jobs. (Achieve/burningglass, 2017).

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.*

Nika Elugardo: Comprehensive health care is a right. Massachusetts has made strides in expanding access and has one of the lowest uninsured rates in the country but has the second highest health-care costs—more than \$10,000/person. As a result, 17% of residents have an unmet medical need because they can't afford care, and a similar percentage is struggling to pay off medical debt for the care they did receive.

The rapidly rising cost of health care is consuming the state budget, reducing our already limited ability

to fund other critical public goods like education, the environment, human services, infrastructure, and public safety. To leave our health-care system as is would be unjust and economically unsustainable.

I will champion a single-payer, Medicare-for-All system that will guarantee health care as a right for all residents; support regulations guaranteeing coverage of essential services; reduce costs by negotiating lower drug prices and eliminating wasteful administrative costs; expand safety net programs for the un- and underinsured; and continue the fight to expand behavioral health and addiction treatment services, including Safe Injection Facilities. I have received the Mass-Care (Massachusetts Campaign for Single Payer Health Care) endorsement.

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

Nika Elugardo:

- As a Senior Policy Advisor at the State House, healthcare finance was my largest and most complex policy area. I supported the senator in advocating for healthcare for the homeless and in promoting greater equity and affordability. Supported numerous constituents in accessing health care services and in navigating complexities of insurance coverage for services. Supported constituents with serious mental illness in connecting to resources and services and in addressing discriminatory practices.
- Helped found and support collaboration of health advocates, faith leaders and doctors working on End of Life issues. The group creates opportunities for community gathering and community-based research to foster deeper understanding of holistic approaches to end of life care.
- One of the lead researchers for project to foster understanding of the instance and causes of racism in mental health care experience of American Born Blacks. Interviewed residents and service providers across sectors of service (e.g., housing, hospital care, police). Coded research and presented for advocate and community training and discussion of next steps.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes. See Question 1.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes. I am a pro-choice candidate. I fully support the legislative agendas of NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts and Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

6. **Prescription Drug Pricing.** *Would you support a drug transparency law, like the one recently passed in*

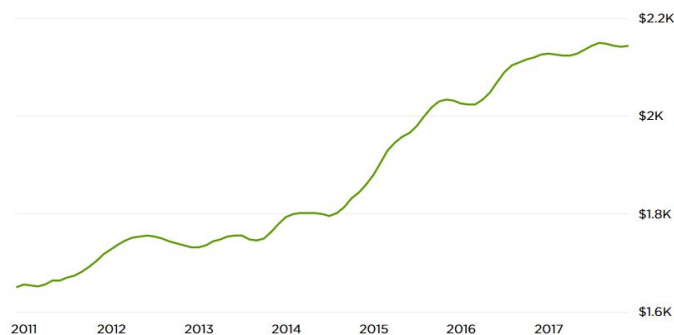
California, that requires pharmaceutical companies to publicly justify steep price increases?

Nika Elugardo: 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?

Nika Elugardo: Constantly rising real estate prices are a key driver of growing wealth inequality. Current housing policy enables and encourages these rising prices, makes rents out of reach for the average resident, and shuts out an ever-growing portion of residents from homeownership, a key source of wealth creation. These most dramatically affect people of color, young professionals, and lower-to-middle-income families, exacerbating economic injustice in the system. We must maintain and expand affordable housing options that are transit-accessible for low- and very low-income residents, and recognize that “affordable housing” as defined by the State is now too expensive even for many middle-income families.

I will:

- Work to increase public housing funding, as well as investment in CDCs and nonprofits that build affordable housing;

- Sponsor a repeal of the ban on rent control, returning this policy tool to municipalities to use at their discretion;
- Create pathways to home ownership, including sponsoring a tenant’s right-to-purchase law, strengthening community land trusts that already exist, and creating paths towards cooperative ownership;
- Help stabilize communities by supporting the Jim Brooks Stabilization Act and the Just Cause Eviction act;
- Work to ensure that new developments and public housing renovations do not displace low-income residents;
- Work with advocates across the Commonwealth who are fighting to prevent and end individual and family homelessness in Massachusetts;
- Work to pass the Homeless Bill of Rights;
- Ensure my legislative autonomy by refusing to accept campaign donations from real estate developers.
- Help stabilize communities by supporting Rep Mike Connolly’s H3512, an Act Supporting Affordable Housing with a Local Option for a Fee to be Applied for Very Large Real Estate Transactions, or Transfer fee.

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

Nika Elugardo:

- After healthcare finance, housing was the next largest component of my policy and advocacy portfolio. Not only did I work to build collaboration across housing agencies and advocacy groups, I also supported constituents in navigating hurdles in transitional housing and shelters, as well as in fighting eviction.
- As Manager of National Consumer Law Center’s statewide Foreclosure Prevention project, through innovative cross-sector collaboration we helped 88% of families stay in their homes. Groups like ESAC, Vida Urbana and Nuestra Comunidad helped us make the case to Mass Bankers for innovative financial tools to prevent foreclosure. I was also responsible for performing the research used to raise funds for this work and for portions of the related sections of the NCLC publication, Surviving Debt.
- For over 25 years, pro bono and professionally, I have worked for, and later in my career provided organizational or program development support to, to reduce individual and unaccompanied youth homelessness and eliminate family homelessness. Over the years, I have also worked to engage and support people experiencing homelessness in community and cultural leadership.
- My husband and I have also made our home available over the years to people facing homelessness, eviction or other housing instability.

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

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

b. *The Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

It's unacceptable to take money from developers as an elected official. It's essential that state affordable housing ventures work with community-minded developers that put residents first. Definitions of affordable, low-income and very low-income are critical, as well as the proportions of each in home-ownership and rental. Anti-displacement should be a top priority and tracked outcome of any affordable expenditures.

The demand for affordable housing has increased, and current public housing stock is in need of major repair. Throughout US history when the cost of housing was too high the government has stepped up to respond to the needs of its residents. We must stop the practice of privatizing affordable housing.

As a member of the Boston delegation, I will support modifications in the City's Linkage Program to ensure parity between the linkage fees developers pay into affordable housing, and the benefits they derive from development. Developers are currently required to pay around \$10 per square foot, with the the first 100,000 square feet free. This represents a small fraction of their total costs. I would also like to see more clear and accessible reporting on the outcomes of the affordable housing development and job training that is supposed to be developed as a result of these funds, and tracking on what percentage of those benefits enure to the lowest income and elderly communities impacted by development.

I support Senate legislation to fund a 100% match of CPA funding by increasing the Registry of Deeds fee.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. We really need to fight for rent control and to push anti-displacement legislation through to law. We also need to work creatively with community banks to create opportunities for tenants to become owners of their homes, whether as individuals or cooperatively.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes. Not only do I support it but managed the seminal program that created the models for this used today - see above. I worked with housing counselling leaders across the state, including at ESAC, Vida Urbana and Nuestra Comunidad, which serve members of our district. I also trained counselors in other states on our model.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. I will work to help stabilize communities by supporting the Jim Brooks Stabilization Act and the Just Cause Eviction act;

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. We need to enforce more equitable zoning practices.

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?*

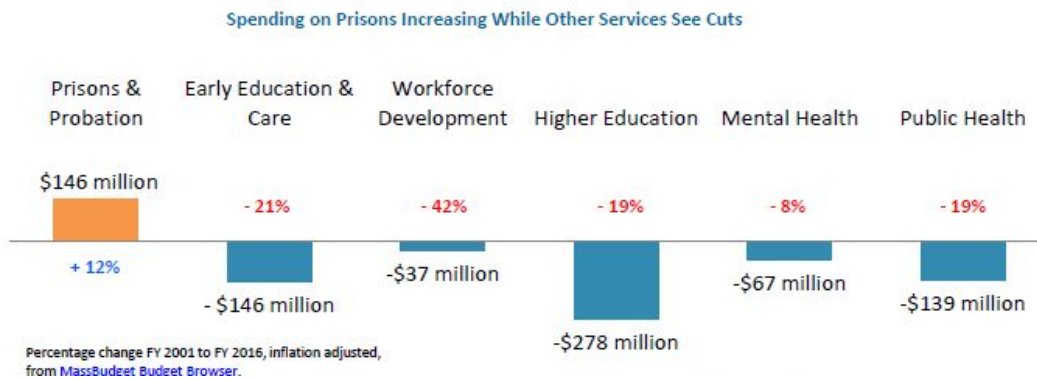
Nika Elugardo: Yes. It’s critical to prioritize people over corporations in our community and this graduated tax is a good way to do that.

I also support City Councilor O’Malley’s proposal to impose a fee on empty units in the City of Boston. Unused housing and storefronts, used as piggy-banks for wealthy speculators, drive up costs while providing no value to the community.

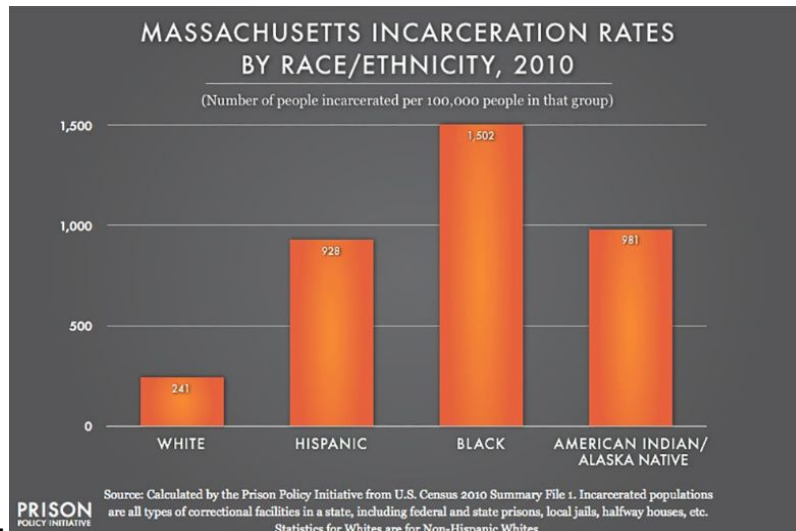
F. RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

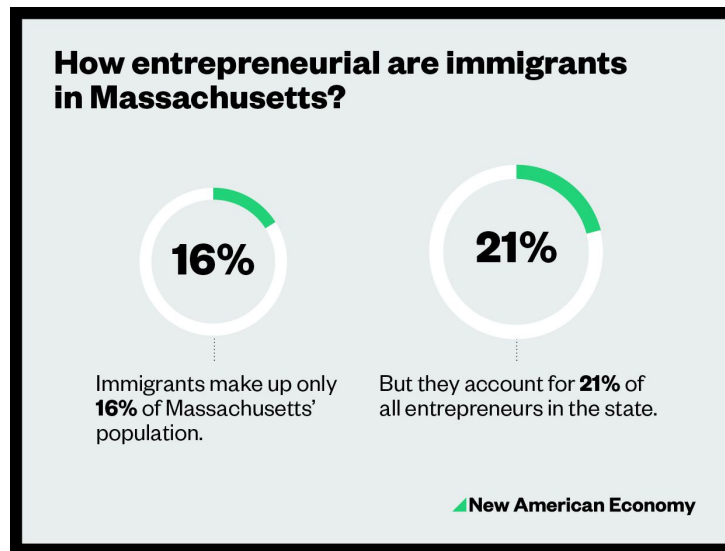
Massachusetts must continue to strive to be a state that welcomes and embraces all of its residents and combats prejudice and discrimination of all kinds. The social and economic costs of mass incarceration and the policies that created it, in particular, have put our aspirations of “justice for all”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

Nika Elugardo: White supremacy is a 4-legged beast. The legs - misogyny, racism, xenophobia, and homophobia - always travel together. To kill the beast we must defeat them all. Last year I led my team and organization in assessing white supremacy in people-of-color-led organizations and groups. Though raised in low-income black urban communities, it's amazing how much privilege I myself have carried throughout my life, and increasingly with education and job privilege.

I've engaged in and facilitated exercises and trainings on race, nationality and socio-economic reconciliation and justice since college. In those years it was to address division amongst teachers in the summer education program where I worked. All students were low-income youth of color and so were half of the teachers, but half of the teachers were from white very wealthy backgrounds. And every year since, I've continued working on these issues in numerous capacities, professionally and personally, including on organizational boards, toward the mission of dismantling structural racism and its counterparts, here in Boston and in other regions of the world.

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

Nika Elugardo: I launched a Gender Justice research and consulting stream which developed breakthrough models for collaboration between leaders. We supported communities of faith in using community-based research methods to identify institutional and community-level sexual violence, trafficking, and harassment, and supported them to develop follow-up training and resources. We worked with women faith leaders to help them overcome prejudices and unconscious bias based on race, income, sexual orientation, disability, and religion. I spent years as a pro bono consultant training and supporting leaders combating sexual violence and political persecution against women locally and internationally and have consulted philanthropists desiring to bring systems thinking tools to their work to empower indigenous women leaders worldwide.

I've learned from the Deaf community, bringing experts to perform skits on inclusion and understanding. While these tools were designed to help people engage respectfully with Deaf women, my team drew out the applications for other types of respect and reconciliation.

Extensive interfaith work includes partnership building between Muslims, Hindus and Christians. I did anti-ableism organizing at the Kennedy school as part of my training under organizing guru Marshall Ganz.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. One focus I personally brought to my work in applied research has been LGBTQ+ justice, specifically helping faith-based organizations understand, prepare for, and truly embrace the Massachusetts Public Accommodation Law. In our Gender Justice work with faith leaders we developed tools for educating around gender fluidity and inclusion. As a grad student volunteer, I supported efforts to reduce school bullying against LGBTQ+ youth. And, I've personally been a strong advocate in my own faith community for education and change where outright homophobia and unconscious bias and privilege lead to excluding and even harming LGBTQ+ members of our faith community.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. The federal government is systematically dismantling advances in LGBTQ+ justice, even at the expense of people's lives. It is not enough to support LGBTQ+ concerns; we must advocate for them urgently. This is literally life or death, as even the presence of phobic ballot initiatives negatively impact the mental and physical health of LGBTQ+ youth and adults. ["Studies have documented higher psychiatric disorders among LGB adults living in US states that banned marriage for same-sex couples (Hatzenbuehler et al. 2010) and higher psychological distress for LGB adults who lived in states in the months following an election cycle where constitutional amendments to ban marriage for same-sex couples were on the ballot (Rostosky et al. 2009)."]

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. Drug use is a public health and poverty issue that needs to be addressed through health care, workforce, and education programs. Incarceration is a failed model that has done nothing but drain resources from government, unnecessarily increase the financial and mental health burdens of children and families of incarcerated persons, and exacerbate racial inequality. We need to ensure that all people facing addiction have a fair shot at getting back on their feet and mandatory minimums are an obstacle to that.

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?

Nika Elugardo: Yes. I support diverting “emerging adults” ages 18, 19, and 20 into juvenile jurisdiction. This would reduce recidivism and prevent deeper criminal involvement by ensuring young adults are held accountable while incorporating appropriate education.

Research on emerging adults’ continuing brain development shows young adults are more prone to risk-taking and heavily influenced by their environments. The vast majority “age out” of criminal behavior, particularly with developmentally appropriate interventions. Overly punitive approaches and exposure to adult jails and prisons, entrenches young adults in problematic behaviors, increasing probability of recidivism. I would support a research-based age, as high as 26, which would comport with the definition of youth for many youth development programs seeking to help young people recover from traumatic past or simply develop the healthy skills to build a future for themselves.

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)?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. Yes, provided "close in age" factors in careful standards for meaningful, intentional and legal consent of both minor parties.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. I support banning solitary confinement. Solitary confinement is torture. Professor Juan Méndez, the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment has called on all countries to ban the solitary confinement of prisoners except in very exceptional circumstances and for as short a time as possible, with an absolute prohibition in the case of juveniles and people with mental disabilities.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes. A transparent and independent review is beneficial to the both the public and to the police force. Citizens and law enforcement should be able to trust that an investigation will be handled fairly without bias.

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?

Nika Elugardo: 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?

Nika Elugardo: Yes. I support the Safe Communities Act which protects Massachusetts law enforcement agencies from federal overreach into local decisions regarding community safety and stops the diversion of scarce state and local tax dollars to federal responsibilities. The Safe Communities Act is essential legislation prioritizing the safety of our communities; without the Safe Communities Act, police become ICE agents and immigrant victims and witnesses of crime are afraid to call the police which makes us all less safe.

Immigrants are crucial contributors to vibrant and prosperous communities across the Commonwealth. Immigrants make Massachusetts strong. As a community, we must stand strong with people who have Temporary Protected (TP) and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, as well as with other individuals without documentation who are fighting for legal protections to live free and full lives in Massachusetts. As an elected official, I will support policy and pathways to jobs, health care, education and citizenship, regardless of a resident's document status.

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?

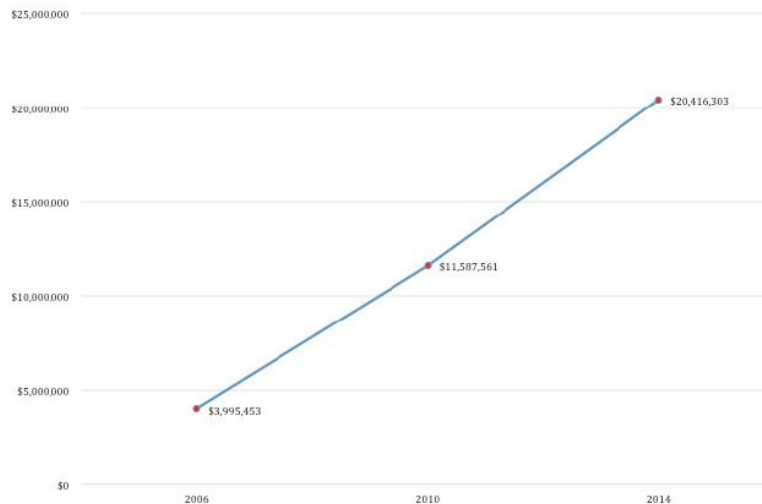
Nika Elugardo: Yes. Every resident, regardless of their immigration status should be able to drive to take their loved ones to school and medical appointments. I will work close with the Safe Driving coalition to plan a strategy to pass this legislation in the near future. Undocumented immigrants pay taxes every year, but are not able to receive any of that back because.

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.*

Nika Elugardo: Unfortunately, our State House is structured to leave legislators beholden to the Speaker, who himself is beholden to corporate donors. Campaign finance reform, transparency, and new House rules are necessary to return the power back to the voters. And the only way to make progress in this arena is to elect progressive legislators across the state who will call for a new approach to governance, based on transparency and democratic decision making at the committee level, versus the Speaker and a small group calling the shots behind closed doors.

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

Nika Elugardo: For years I have studied the systems that underlie institutions - in both private and public sectors. The system in our State House that perpetuates a concentration of power away from the voters must be reversed. I have advocated for policies such as:

- Remove the exemption of our legislature from the public records laws
- Draft and pass transparency and accessibility rules to make committee decisions and legislative voting records easily accessible to constituents online and by request over mail.
- Restore term limits
- Allow committees to elect their own chairs
- End gerrymandering that allows legislators to be complacent

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. I would vote to require roll call votes to be posted on the Clerks' website in line with H2019, which was unfortunately defeated. Our communities must be fully aware of what is going on at the State House to participate effectively in our democracy.

Unfortunately, as evidenced by the Progressive Mass Scorecard, my incumbent opponent has voted in every opportunity to further entrench the powers of the conservative speaker.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. In addition to supporting the end to the exemption, when elected I will voluntarily comply with the public records law. Public servants must be held to the highest ethical standards and secrecy stands in the way of that.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes. Public financing can help erode the power of corporations in our democracy. For example, the Brennan Center has pioneered a proposal that amplifies the role of average votes in elections by matching and multiplying small donations (e.g. a \$50 donation in a 5:1 matching system is worth \$300 to the candidate; this both re-directs candidates' attention from moneyed special interests to ordinary citizens). If only wealthy candidates or those backed by a few privileged individuals or institutions run, then we have a less vibrant, diverse, and robust democracy.

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"?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

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

- a. *Election day voter registration*

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

b. Automatic voter registration

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

d. No-fault absentee voting

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

I would also work to pass progressive legislation that ended state-level gerrymandering and restore people’s rights to vote in prison.

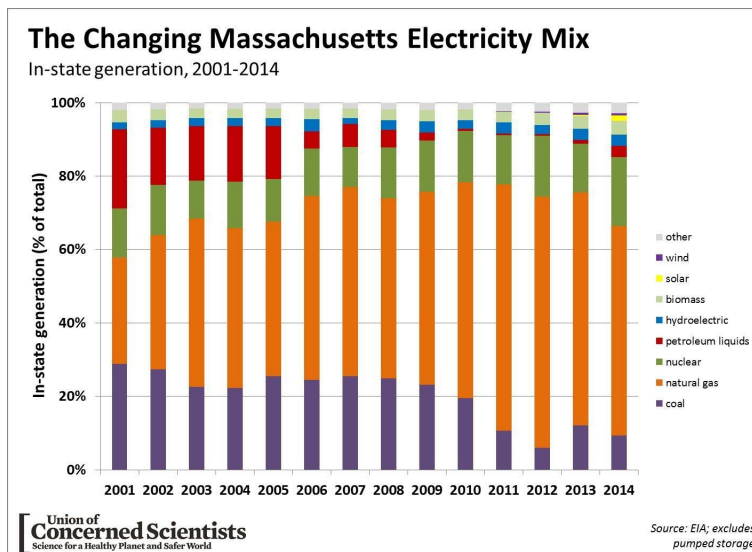
H. SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

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.

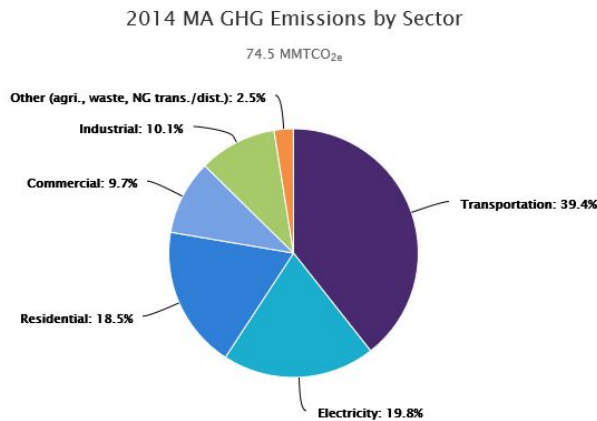
Equity issues loom large, as low-income communities and communities of color are often the most vulnerable to natural disasters and bear the brunt of pollution. In 2014, Governor Deval Patrick signed an executive order directing all state agencies to devote resources to protect the health, safety, and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

Nika Elugardo: The environment has been an incredible part of my personal healing, throughout my childhood and up to today. It is so important to have more people of color who were raised in low-income urban settings advocating for our planet and its resources and beauty.

Sustainable Infrastructure, Environmental Protection, and Progressive Justice are intricately intertwined. Our air, land and water are resources that belong equally to everyone, and we must be intentional about protecting and preserving them. This includes humane practices of food production and promoting healthy local agriculture.

The social benefits of caring for and preserving these and other natural resources are almost endless. It's a basic human right to responsibly enjoy the richness of our planet's food and natural resources. It violates basic norms of justice when some people or groups have greater access to these riches than others, based on demographics like race or socioeconomic status. We should not tolerate unjust distribution of the benefits of or the harm to our environment.

This includes making sure there are no food deserts to threaten the food security.

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

Nika Elugardo: My very first foray into environmental justice was an effort to mobilize my family's new public housing community in the waning months of my senior year in high school. I quickly learned that our low income communities were all too accustomed to being the dumping ground for toxic waste and crumbling infrastructure. My neighbors feared rocking the boat and even in some cases seemed to equate having a low-income with "the lot" of bearing the primary burden of our city's environmental abuse. This is the crux of environmental justice, helping communities to become aware not only of their rights, but also of their power and resourcefulness, so they can both fight for change and build the safe communities and quality of life all people deserve. My work since has been dedicated to doing just that through grassroots community and economic development and leadership development.

My interest in transit and transportation began as an Urban Studies and Planning student at MIT. I would later go on to support advocates in fighting for transit justice and fair fares on the MBTA, as Senior Policy Advisor to Senator Sonia Chang Diaz. Transportation was one of my 5 areas of policy responsibility. As the senator's Jamaica Plain Liaison in 2011, I strongly advocated for and supported design of neighborhood engagement processes and resident advocacy on the City's Casey Overpass Task Force. I served on the Walsh administration transition team that developed the 100 day targets for equitable transportation, transit, and mobility. I then served on the follow-up Advisory Committee that, in deep collaboration with communities and diverse groups (including youth and student advocates) across the city, developed the "Go Boston 2030" plan for imagining our transportation future and a walkable, bikeable city with zero pedestrian deaths. That was an incredible experience of community engagement and grassroots leadership impacting policy frameworks and commitments.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes. I support the work of community-based organizations that advocate to uphold Massachusetts' prohibition on increasing trash incineration and that advocate for recycling and waste reduction. We must make sure the Department of Environmental Protection is held accountable for the goals laid out in its Solid Waste Master Plan 2010-2020. As a legislator, I will advocate for policies that encourage us to adopt policies that follow the principles of reduce, reuse, recycle and use data to hold the Commonwealth and other parties (including corporations) accountable to these principles.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. I am jealous that California beat us to adopting legislation to require new residential developments to include solar panels. We are missing not only the opportunity for stimulating the local renewable energy business sector and job growth, but we are also renegeing on our responsibility to leave our future generations with 351 cities and towns that are better off than today. We don't have any more time to wait. Doing nothing, or even moving too slowly, is the same as destroying the lands, air, and seas of our beautiful Commonwealth, not to mention the habitats and liveability for people who will not be able to afford to move when they get flooded out.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes. The current rate of increase in RPS will not get Massachusetts to 100% renewable energy until the 22nd century. We cannot afford to wait.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes. As we have seen with pipelines such as the Dakota Access Pipeline, the consequences of building dirty pipelines for local communities, in particular low-income and marginalized ones, can be catastrophic. I would oppose new fossil fuel infrastructure in favor of further investment in renewable sources of energy.

A critical component to preventing more gas pipelines is increased wind power. Wind farms often generate the most power during cold winter months, and can eliminate the need for additional gas when our state reaches peak energy demands.

8. **Carbon pricing.**

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes. We are a state with ample renewable resources and technological innovation. We are capable of doing much more to invest in our green infrastructure, from funding low-emissions public

transit, being leaders in taxing carbon emissions and creating strict pollution controls, creating green jobs, and restoring our habitats to cope with climate change. Our current legislature is too friendly to utilities. They need to be pressured to increase their Renewable Portfolio Standard much more quickly, or we will be well into the 22nd century before we are free of nonrenewable energy. That's too late!

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?*

Nika Elugardo: Yes.

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

Nika Elugardo: Yes. Public transportation is vital to our District and the Commonwealth. A strong public transportation infrastructure allows students to get to schools, workers to get to jobs, customers to get to businesses, and all of us to accomplish our daily tasks -- safely and affordably. This is one of the reasons I support the Fair Share Amendment; this small tax surcharge will provide between \$1.6B and \$2.2B to rebuild roads, repair bridges and tunnels, improve sidewalks and bike paths, and make

desperately needed improvements to the MBTA.

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?*

Nika Elugardo: **Yes.** The state should be providing more support for quality transit everywhere in the state, including the areas outside Boston-metro area that have not received their fair share of infrastructure investment. As we work to increase revenue in the House, localities should also have the flexibility to raise additional funds if their citizens support it.

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.

Nika Elugardo: I am running to champion the progressive justice values of our district in the House of Representatives. The Senate has made major gains passing progressive legislation in education, immigration, and public health, but these have not been reflected in the House.

Last session Progressive Mass Scorecard rated 7 representatives out of 160 at an A or A-. The current 15th Suffolk Representative got a B -. Since getting a promotion he's at a C+.

We need progressive champions in the House. You'll have my vote, and my cosponsorship, on every progressive bill.

We'll start with education for all. Healthcare for all. Housing for all. These are areas of systemic leverage that impact change across other arenas, like immigration, criminal justice and environmental justice. There is active Senate legislation on all these that requires a champion in the house. I will be that champion. I will represent our values with the fearsomeness and data driven experience I have learned from community leaders and advocates. You will never have to lobby me to do justice. We will work together with local communities and leaders of all ages and backgrounds to craft smart solutions and to educate communities across Massachusetts about the return on investment of progressive justice.