

Jo Comerford

**Hampshire, Franklin
and Worcester**

State Senator



Endorsement Questionnaire

Office Sought: State Senator

Legislative District: Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester

Party: Democratic

Website: jocomerford.org

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

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

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
Jo Comerford	3
II. THE ISSUES	5
A. REVENUE AND TAXATION	5
B. JOB GROWTH AND THE ECONOMY	7
C. EDUCATION	10
D. HEALTH CARE	14
E. HOUSING	16
F. RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	18
G. GOOD GOVERNMENT/ STRONG DEMOCRACY	21
H. SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION	23

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

Jo Comerford

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

Jo Comerford : I'm running because I know what it takes to fight for issues that will improve the quality of life for every person in my district and across the Commonwealth.

My career working for smart government spending and tax priorities, sound environmental policies, health care, food security, and strong public schools demonstrates my unwavering commitment to the belief that everyone deserves the opportunity to succeed and thrive.

This ideal is the bedrock of my candidacy. It's what inspires me to campaign for public office. And it's a big part of why I'm ready to take up the work ahead in the State Senate.

My district deserves a fierce, fearless, and tireless advocate—someone determined to help address the immediate needs of our region while also working to manifest a bold and progressive vision for what's possible.

For more than 20 years regionally and nationally, I've marshaled people power to hold lawmakers accountable and help ensure that our government works in the best interest of constituents.

To do this, I've needed to know how change happens, know how government works. Now, I want to put my skills and experience to work as a lawmaker who honors this powerful bond between an elected official and her constituents.

Send me to the State House and I will arrive not just as one woman determined to be a champion for my district, but as someone who knows that I bring the strength, grit, and hope of upwards of 160,000 constituents from 24 communities with me.

My campaign for State Senate is grounded in solid and unwavering progressive values, including: racial justice, immigrant rights, public education (early childhood to college), environmental justice, accessible and affordable health care, economic development rooted in good jobs, reliable public transportation, and food security rooted in my region's local agriculture.

My top three campaign priorities are (1) Public education including securing free public higher education, (2) affordable and accessible health care with support for Single Payer, and (3) climate justice which includes a commitment to renewable energy and green jobs.

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

Jo Comerford : I came to western Massachusetts 20 years ago, fresh out of grad school, with an MSW from Hunter College School of Social Work in New York.

While in New York, I helped lead prison reform campaigns – especially focused on the impact of incarceration on mothers and the root causes of women's incarceration. I also worked in the New York public shelter system.

When I arrived in western Massachusetts, I led a crisis intervention outreach team through the Center for Human Development focused on work with people struggling with mental and physical health issues, trauma, and poverty.

I then worked for seven years as the director of the western Massachusetts American Friends Service Committee and then as director of programs at The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. At The Food Bank, I focused my efforts on meeting the immediate demands of hunger and food insecurity, while also working to reduce hunger regionally.

After The Food Bank, I led National Priorities Project as its executive director. Under my leadership, NPP was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of its essential work to make the U.S. federal budget accessible.

For the past four years, I've been proud to be a Campaign Director at MoveOn. While at MoveOn, I've helped lead campaigns focused on gun safety, in defense of the Iran Nuclear Deal and the Trump/Russia investigation led by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, and in strong opposition to the toxic agenda of Donald Trump.

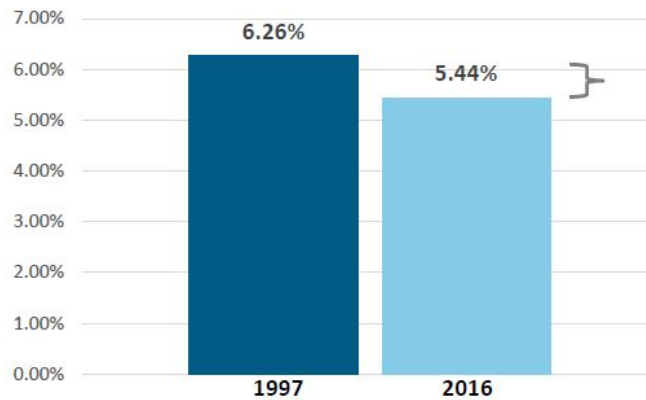
Bottom line: I know how government works. I have first-hand experience in cracking open complex budgets, helping to broker and implement public policy, and leading strategic and game-changing initiatives in strong partnership with lawmakers at the national, state, and local levels. Now, I want to leverage that experience and serve my community in the State House.

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.

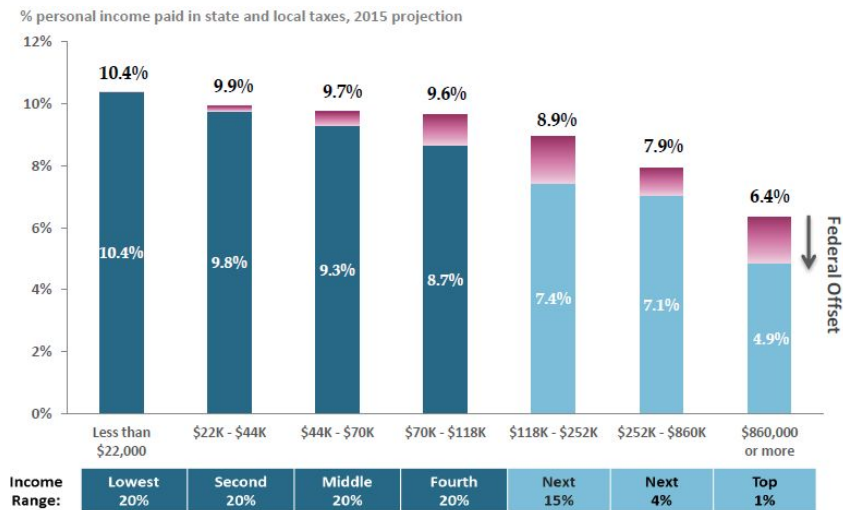
Declining revenues have meant drastic cuts, limiting our ability to invest in our communities and future economic stability.

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?*

Jo Comerford : I support progressive tax policies that ensure people pay their fair share of taxes. I believe taxes are akin to dues we pay to live in a democracy. I would work to address regressive taxes which place an unfair burden on the poor and working and middle classes.

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.).*

Jo Comerford : I spent seven years as executive director of National Priorities Project which is a progressive budget organization. You can see a selection of past budget talks here: <https://jocomerford.org/press/> (at the bottom).

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?*

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

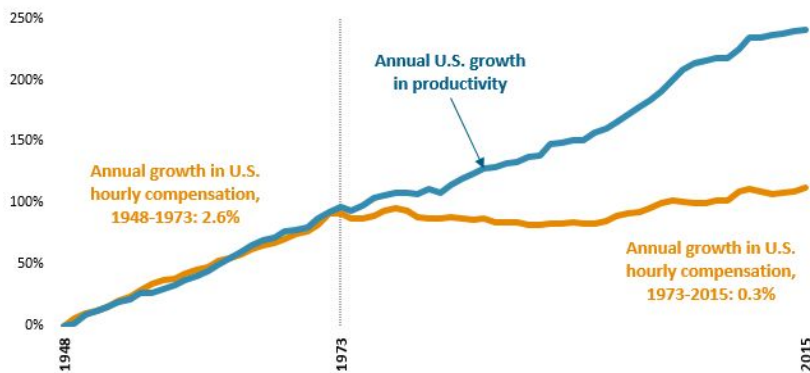
B. JOB GROWTH AND THE ECONOMY

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

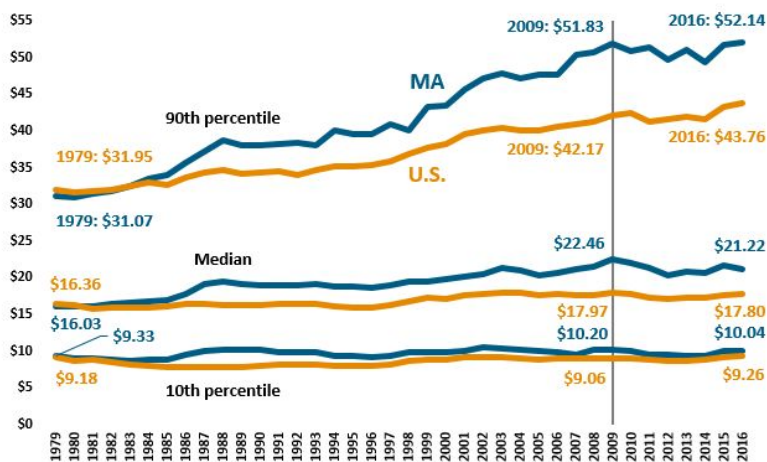
Cumulative Change in U.S. Hourly Wages for Private-Sector Production/Non-Supervisory Workers and Net Productivity, 1948-2015



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?

Jo Comerford : I believe investing in good, secure jobs with necessary benefits is key to the economic well-being of the Commonwealth. I believe in a Living Wage, but as a justice issue and as a proven economic growth engine. I see job growth potential in the green jobs and infrastructure sectors. I see economic inequality as corrosive and believe that government spending and tax policies can help redress the widening gap.

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?

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : 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?

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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?

Jo Comerford : 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?

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

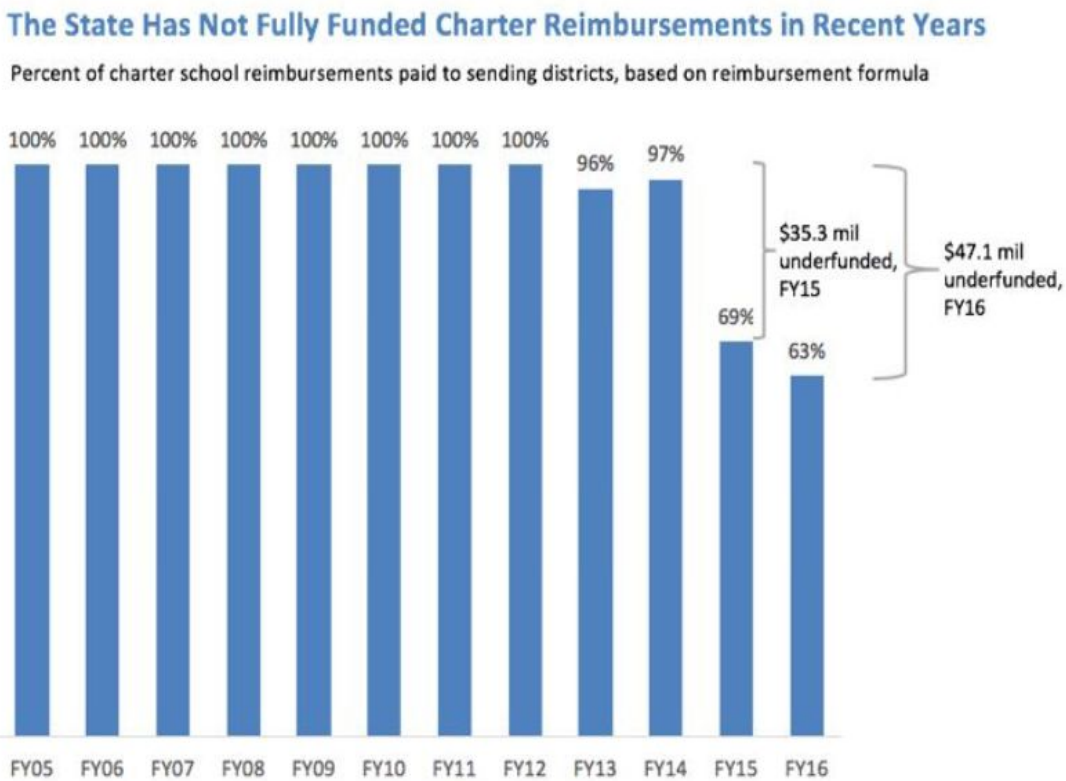
9. **Economic Democracy.** *Would you support legislation to foster and develop employee ownership of businesses in Massachusetts and encourage the formation of cooperatives and/or benefit corporations?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

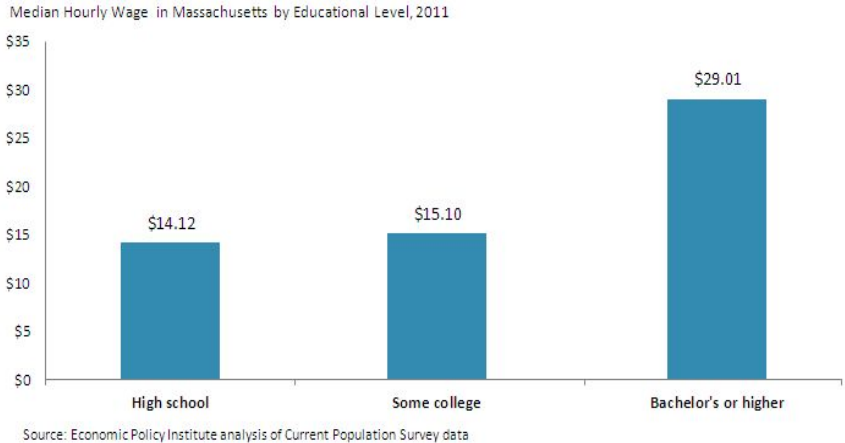
C. EDUCATION

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.

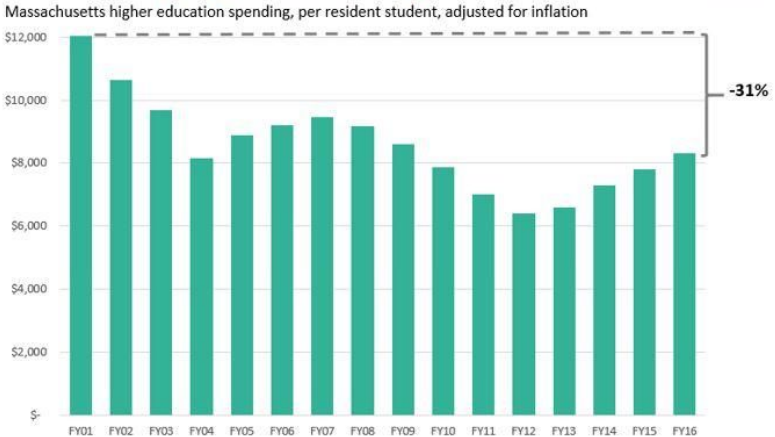


Higher educational attainment leads to higher wages.



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?***

Jo Comerford : Public education is the foundation of our democracy. I support greater investment in our public schools and work to address a broken funding formula. I oppose charter school expansion and high-stakes testing. I support free public higher education as one way to address the student debt crisis.

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

Jo Comerford : I have been active locally in my children's public elementary school, leading the efforts to build a new accessible playground and serving on the leadership of our PTO.

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

Jo Comerford : 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?***

Jo Comerford : 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?***

Jo Comerford : 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?***

Jo Comerford : 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?***

Jo Comerford : 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?

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : Yes.

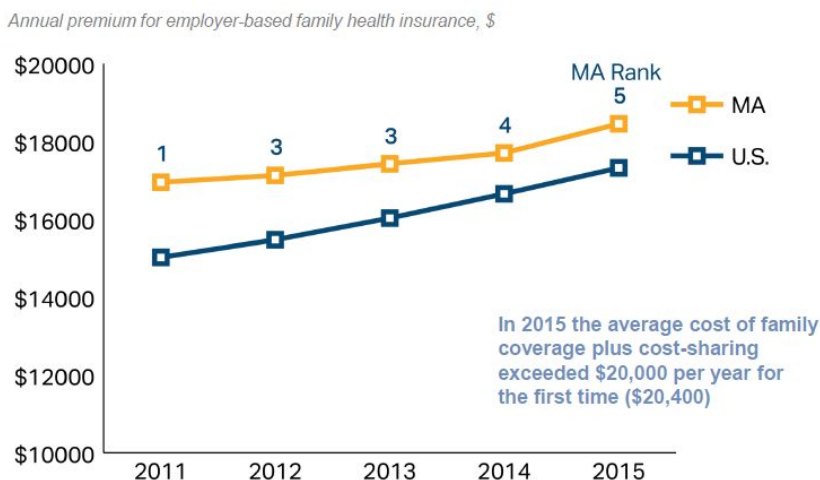
- 9. Tuition-Free Higher Education.** *Would you support making tuition free at public colleges and universities?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

D. HEALTH CARE

Massachusetts has led the way in providing near universal health insurance coverage, with 97% of the state having health insurance. We provided the blueprint for the national Affordable Care Act, with an insurance-based reform passed by the Democratic Legislature and signed by Republican Governor Romney. While the reforms of President Obama's Affordable Care Act are under assault by Republicans (who control the Executive and both legislative chambers), Massachusetts could lead in more progressive health care reforms. Even without the Republican dismantling of national reforms, there is still work to do right here in Massachusetts. MA's Democratic Legislature passed, and the Republican governor signed, the ACCESS bill in 2017--protecting the right to no-fee contraception, which is (federally) under threat: Where our federal advances are being rolled back, Massachusetts could--and should--push progressively forward. Significant disparities in health insurance coverage and health care access continue to exist along income, racial, and education lines. Premiums continue to rise, and medical debt remains a persistent problem. We still spend an oversized portion of public and private money on health care, but without necessarily achieving better health outcomes.

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



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

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

Jo Comerford :

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?

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

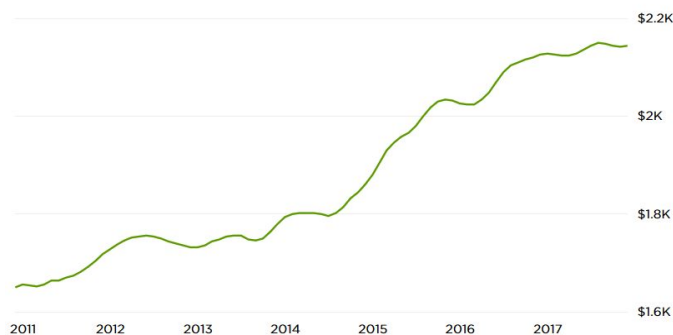
6. **Prescription Drug Pricing.** *Would you support a drug transparency law, like the one recently passed in California, that requires pharmaceutical companies to publicly justify steep price increases?*

Jo Comerford : 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?

Jo Comerford :

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?

Jo Comerford : Yes.

- b. The Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program?

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

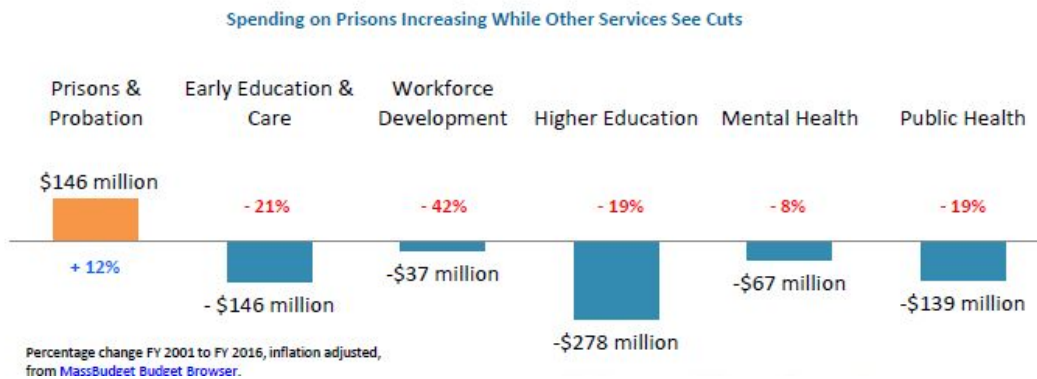
8. **Combating Speculation.** *Would you support legislation to allow cities and towns to impose a graduated tax on private real estate transactions over \$2.5 million, with the money allocated to affordable housing trust funds?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

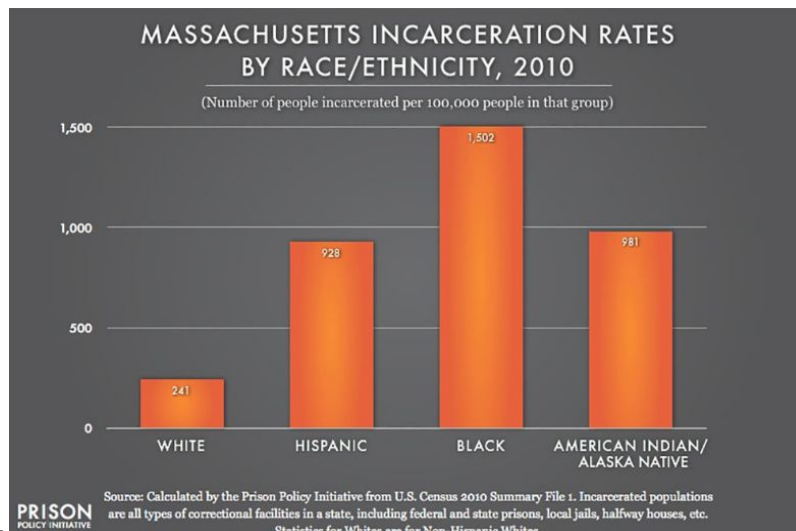
F. RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

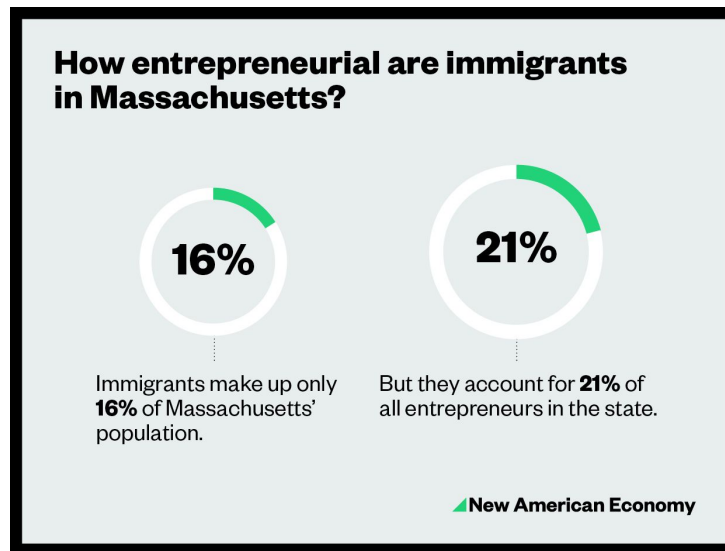
Massachusetts must continue to strive to be a state that welcomes and embraces all of its residents and combats prejudice and discrimination of all kinds. The social and economic costs of mass incarceration and the policies that created it, in particular, have put our aspirations of “justice for all”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

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



Significant racial disparities exist in incarceration in Massachusetts





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

Jo Comerford : I have spent my career working for racial and economic justice. I believe this work must be intrinsic to any grassroots or legislative agenda.

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

Jo Comerford : My work to address structural racism ranges from prison work I led in New York more than 20 years ago which focused on ending racist mandatory sentencing policies to work I've supported at MoveOn this year around fighting the xenophobic Muslim Ban.

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?*

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

6. **Juvenile Justice -- Part I.** Ample research shows that teenage offenders served by a juvenile system are much less likely to re-offend and more likely to successfully transition to adulthood. Teenagers in a juvenile system have access to greater educational and counseling services, and they're much less likely to face sexual assault than at an adult facility. Do you support raising the age of criminal majority from 18 to 21?

Jo Comerford : 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)?

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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?

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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?

Jo Comerford : 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?

Jo Comerford : 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?

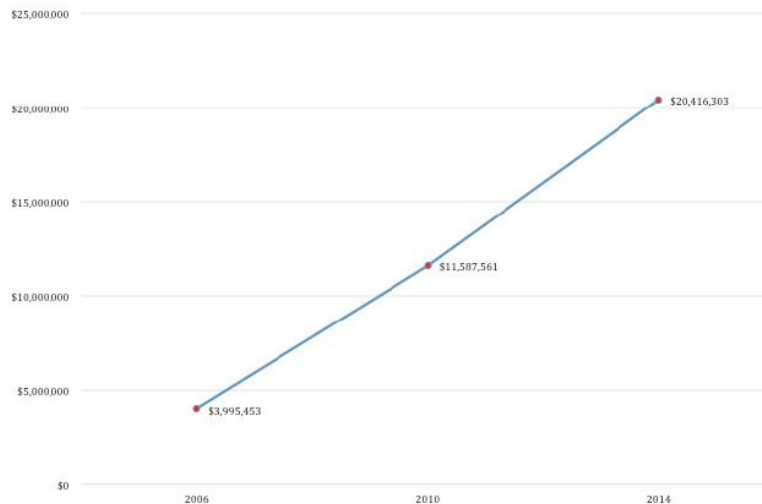
Jo Comerford : Yes.

G. GOOD GOVERNMENT/ STRONG DEMOCRACY

The influence of big money in politics is detrimental to democracy. Independent expenditures in MA elections have grown by a factor of five over the past decade. A centralized power structure on Beacon Hill, is undemocratic, and makes it easier for lobbyists to target the top and undermine the system. A strong democracy requires an engaged electorate, but voter turnout in midterm elections, and especially local elections, remains low. Myths about voter fraud are peddled in order to justify voter suppression. The Election Modernization Act of 2014 helped eliminate Massachusetts's embarrassing status as one of the ten worst states in terms of voting rights, but there is still much work to be done.

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

Figure 1: MA Independent Expenditure Totals



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

Jo Comerford : States have a role to play in getting big money out of politics. Ultimately, I believe that an educated and engaged electorate is stronger than any corporate influence--and that we must start at the grassroots to build toward the transformation we need. I believe people have a right to transparent and accountable government.

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

Jo Comerford : My years of work at National Priorities Project and MoveOn have been focused on harvesting the "data of our democracy" in the form of our federal and state spending and tax budget

numbers. During my tenure at MoveOn, the organization was akin to a budget and government watchdog group. At MoveOn, we have broken down access to voting, while also engaging in government accountability.

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?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : 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"?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

a. *Election day voter registration*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

b. *Automatic voter registration*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : Yes.

d. *No-fault absentee voting*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

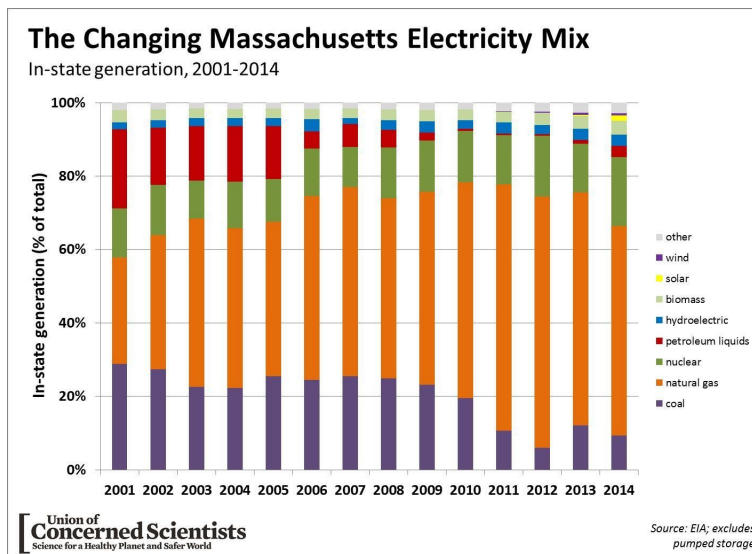
H. SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Massachusetts will be hit particularly hard by climate change. In order to avoid catastrophic climate change, global carbon emissions need to be reduced by 70% by 2050 and brought to 0 by 2080. In 2016, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that the state has failed to meet its legal obligation to set and enforce annual limits on greenhouse gas emissions as outlined in the 2008 Global Warming Solutions Act. Setting and reaching these goals will require the decarbonization of our state economy and a transition away from fossil fuels toward clean, renewable sources of energy. In light of congressional gridlock at the federal level, state government must take a role in incentivizing reduced carbon usage and assisting in coordination between agencies and moving forward local government understanding of looming climate threats.

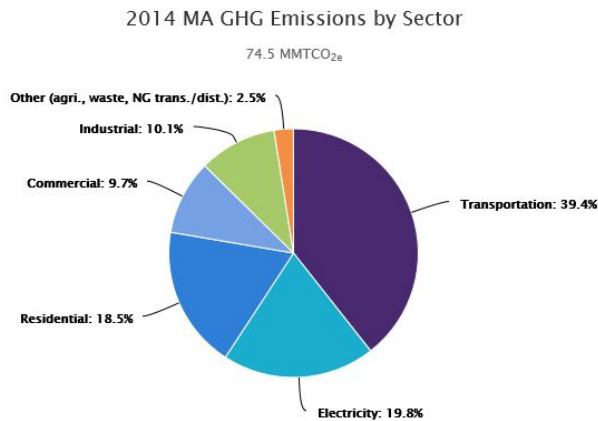
Equity issues loom large, as low-income communities and communities of color are often the most vulnerable to natural disasters and bear the brunt of pollution. In 2014, Governor Deval Patrick signed an executive order directing all state agencies to devote resources to protect the health, safety, and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

Public transit must play a role in decarbonizing our transportation system, as well as advancing complementary goals of equity and inclusion. However, Massachusetts politicians have lost their understanding of public transit as a public good that benefits all residents and businesses in Massachusetts, not just those who use it in their daily lives. The greatest evidence of this is their neglect of the MBTA: its debt has grown to nearly \$5.5 billion, with over \$7 billion in deferred maintenance costs. Regional Transit Authorities that serve communities, including Gateway Cities across the state, face enormous capital needs as well.

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



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



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

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

Jo Comerford :

2. *Please indicate work you personally have done to protect the environment and expand access to public transportation.*
3. ***Waste Reduction.** Would you support a statewide ban on single-use shopping bags and a requirement that alternatives be more sustainable?*

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : Yes.

8. **Carbon pricing.**

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

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.

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

Jo Comerford : 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?*

Jo Comerford : Yes.