

*Thomas Merolli*

# Worcester & Norfolk State Senate

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## *Endorsement Questionnaire*

**Office Sought:** State Senator

**Legislative District:** Worcester & Norfolk

**Party:** Democratic

**Website:** [www.tom4ma.com](http://www.tom4ma.com)

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**Primary:** September 4

**Election:** November 6



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# Introduction: Progressive Mass

## About

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

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

### Membership

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

### How Endorsements Work

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

## Sources

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*Each section features a chart or graph that illustrates one facet of the issue under discussion and is not intended to be comprehensive. All images and data are from Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center ([massbudget.org](https://massbudget.org)).*

# I. About the Candidate

## Thomas Merolli

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

**Thomas Merolli:** I am running for office because, as a town employee and life-long resident, I believe that we have been under-represented. I have become frustrated with the lack of attention our current senator has paid to several important issues facing our district.

My top 3 priorities:

1) Fixing school funding: I fully support implementing the Foundation Budget Formula Study Committee's Recommendations. In addition, I think it is time to visit a new revenue source for funding education. We should also seek innovative ways to fix the problem of collusion in transportation for schooling. One such way is to allow school districts to engage in transportation contracts with RTAs.

2) Clean water: Several towns in my district have issues with drinking water qualities. In Uxbridge, which has the most egregious issue, a loophole in the law allowed soil from contaminated sites, such as the Wynn Casino Project to be dumped on top of a drinking water aquifer, without a lining. (<https://worcestermag.com/2018/05/24/feature-alarmed-water-contamination-fears-stirred-in-uxbridge/59845>) I pledge to close the loophole that allowed this to happen, and force similar projects to pay a surcharge to a mitigation fund to fund pollution cleanup efforts. In other towns, such as Bellingham, Webster, and Milford, the continual water issues stem from a lack of investment in updating our water infrastructure as a state. The state's clean water trust must be funded to the degree that it can act as a reliable source of funds to help fund community water infrastructure projects.

3) Healthcare costs: Healthcare costs remain the largest source of bankruptcy in the country. It is time for Massachusetts to move towards a single-payer system. With taxpayers subsidizing the health insurance companies, the OPEB issue exploding, and the federal government trying to roll back the progress we have made on health care, this is the most prudent choice to make. MA has led the nation on healthcare before. It's time to do so once again. Bonus: Public Transit: Large swathes of my district remain a public transit desert. It is time for this Commonwealth to be fully connected. It is time to expand and fully fund our RTAs. Investing in public transit is an investment in our economy and environmental future.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** I have been involved in local politics for a very long time.

I currently serve as the Town of Mendon's Assistant Treasurer. I am also chair of Mendon's economic development committee, Mendon's Democratic Town Committee, and am a member of the Mendon Historic Commission.

Locally, I have been involved in numerous successful local efforts. I organized Nipmuc alumni to vote

for a successful override to fund our school system in 2015. I was on the committee that successfully passed a historic district in the town in 2016. It was through the override vote that I came to realize the state's system of funding education severely needed an update. As town after town in my district is facing deep financial issues, it is clear that Mendon's problem is not unique. Not only do multiple towns have to pass overrides on a regular basis, this district has a school system in receivership, and an entire town which is about to enter receivership.

In 2014, I worked as the assistant director of an office in Boston which ran successful fundraising campaigns for several political non-profits, including The Nature Conservancy, Save the Children, the ACLU, and SPLC.

I have organized for several successful political campaigns, including Brian Murray's 2016 election campaign as a senior advisor and as a field consultant for Elizabeth Warren's 2012 election campaign.

I worked in Richard Neal's congressional office in Milford as a staffer in 2009, when he represented the area.

I am a union member, a member of Laborers 272.

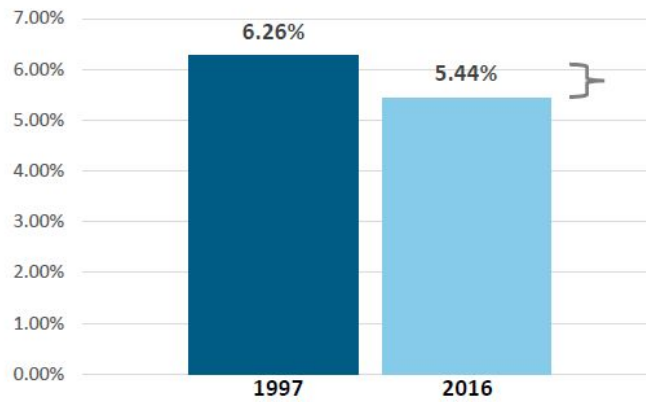
My opponent has one of the most anti-labor records in the entire legislature. It would be poetic justice for a member of a union to defeat him in an election. This district has suffered too long, and needs someone whose ear is close to the ground on the issues that affect us most on the local level.

# 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.

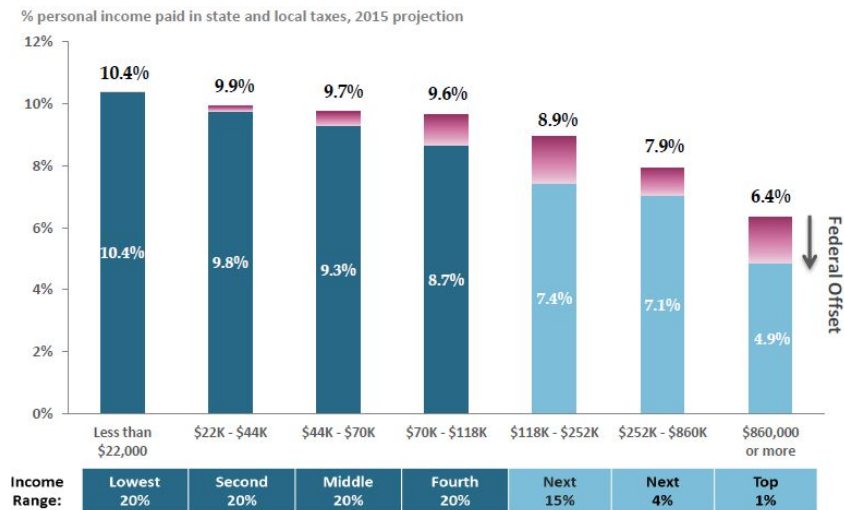
**Declining revenues have meant drastic cuts, limiting our ability to invest in our communities and future economic stability.**

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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** When we pursue policy on the local level, we do so through property taxes, which are inherently regressive. The state adequately funding programs it has started is the way to tackle this.

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.).*

**Thomas Merolli:** I have advocated for increased funding for schools as a candidate and resident of Mendon. I organized voters for an override vote in our town to fund our school system.

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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. It is the ONLY way to truly fund what we need to in this state.

4. *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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. I believe large corporations should not get tax breaks. However- if they get them, disclosing them so the public understands is a good step.

5. *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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. I support breaks especially for small companies, if it will help them pay a living wage.

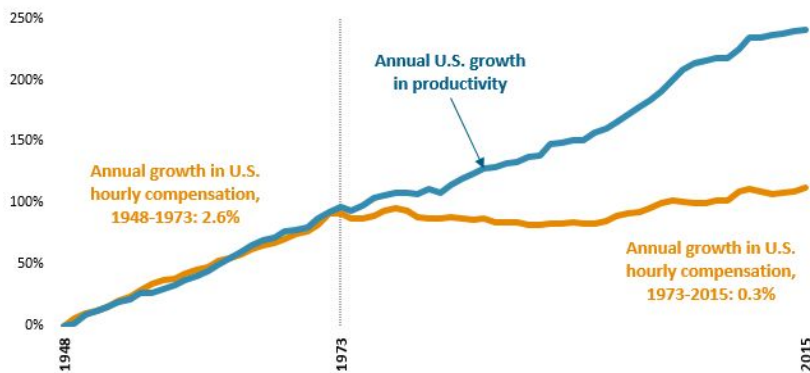
## B. JOB GROWTH AND THE ECONOMY

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

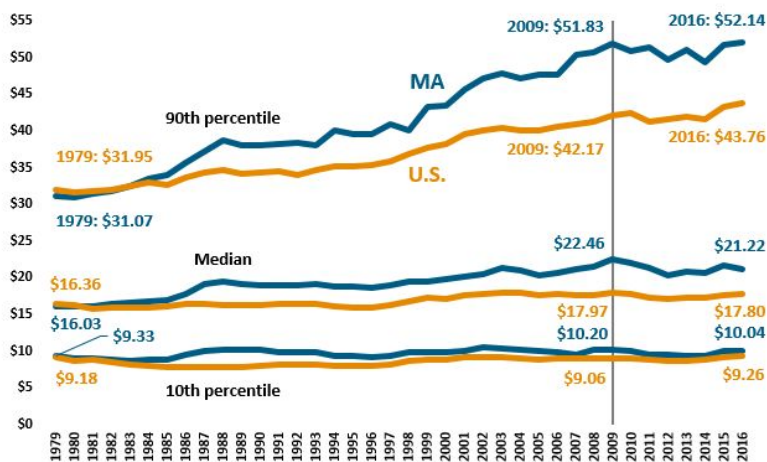
Cumulative Change in U.S. Hourly Wages for Private-Sector Production/Non-Supervisory Workers and Net Productivity, 1948-2015



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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** This is an upside down economy. I think we need to invest in job training, we need to encourage unionization, and push for policies that protect workers' rights. Workplace democracy is of the utmost importance to reverse this trend.

**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.).**

**Thomas Merolli:** I have been pushing a farmer's co-op in my own town of Mendon as a project of the economic development chair.

**3. *Fair Wages.* Do you support eliminating the subminimum wage for tipped workers in support of one fair wage?**

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. I have very strong feelings about fair wages. \$15 is a good start but it is the first of many.

**4. *Paid Vacation Time.* The US is the only advanced economy that does not guarantee workers paid vacation time. Would you support legislation to require that employers provide at least 10 days of paid vacation time per year?**

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?**

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. I'm a union member myself, of Laborers 272. As management in a company, I've actively encouraged my staff to unionize.

**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?**

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. As a unionized public employee, I fully oppose the efforts of right wing think tanks to turn this into a right-to-work country.

**7. *Unions -- Part III.* In the 2018 Janus ruling, the US Supreme Court banned unions from collecting "fair share fees," i.e., fees that workers whose workplaces are they choose not to join the union. Would you support legislation authorizing unions to charge non-members for the specific costs incurred for representing a non-member in a grievance or arbitration case?**

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

**8. *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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

9. **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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

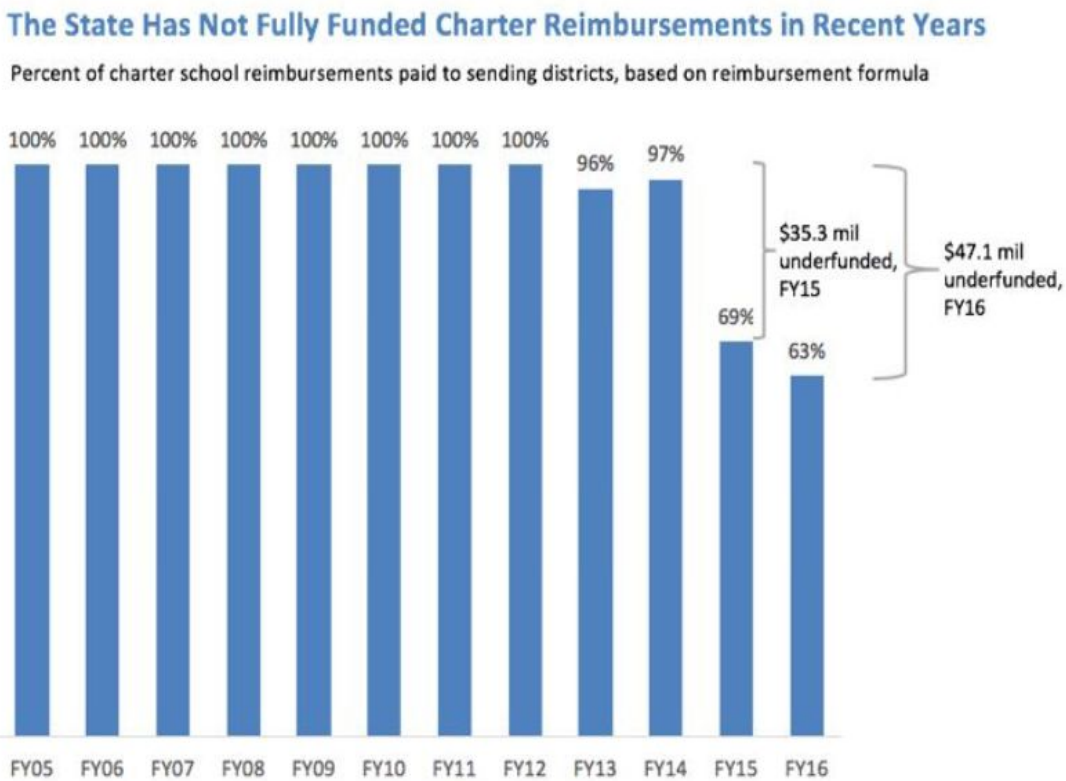
10. **Economic Democracy.** *Would you support legislation to foster and develop employee ownership of businesses in Massachusetts and encourage the formation of cooperatives and/or benefit corporations?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. I've been pushing for the creation of a farmer's co-op in my own town as a project of our economic development committee, I am a sustaining member of the New Economy Coalition.

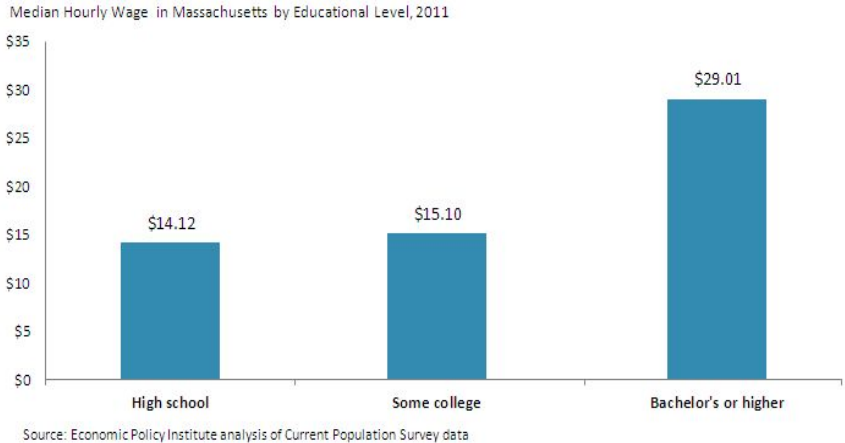
# C. EDUCATION

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.**

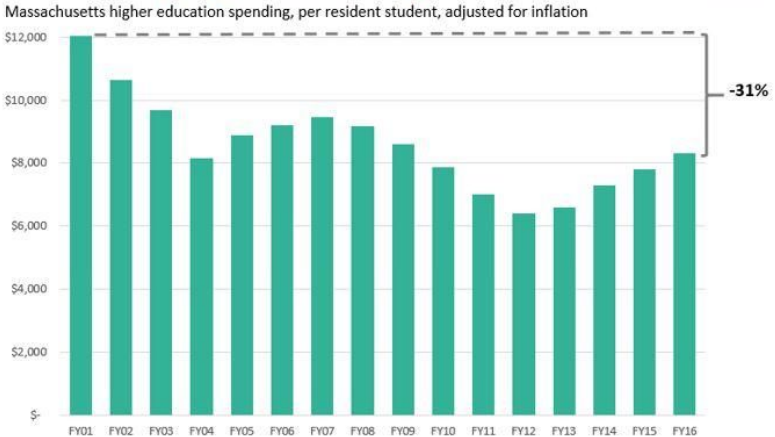


**Higher educational attainment leads to higher wages.**



**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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** I believe that every student, regardless of zip code, social, or economic status, deserves access to a quality public education.

Sadly, that is not the current reality in Massachusetts. Ten of the fourteen towns in my district have had to take overrides in recent years to adequately fund their education systems. Sadly, the state has not upheld its end of the bargain, and we need to fix the formula to be more equitable.

I understand that charter schools have provided some great opportunities. But, the system is flawed. School systems like Southbridge's are negatively affected by charter schools. The cap must not be lifted, and we need to find a better way to fund them.

Vocational schools need to be reformed as well. There are students that could excel in trades, and have the skills needed to have a high paying career, but due to the high barriers to acceptance in trade schools, these students aren't given the opportunity. Douglas high school and BVT had the same percentage of kids going to college, entering the workforce, and entering the military last year. I am not trying to stifle vocational schools, but I do think there needs to be some reform.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** I organized alumni to help pass an override to fund our school system in a town which has only a 25% success rates for overrides.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

4. *Standardized Testing. Do you support a three-year moratorium on the high-stakes uses of standardized testing, as proposed by S.308? (High-stakes" uses include high school graduation, teacher evaluation, and assigning ratings to schools.)*

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. School quality shouldn't be determined by zip code.

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**?*

**Thomas Merolli: Yes.** Charter schools are negatively impacting a community in my district, Southbridge. The school is in receivership, and the charter school in neighboring Sturbridge is leaching off the struggling school system. We need to find a way to fund these schools without taking away from local school districts.

*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?*

**Thomas Merolli: 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?*

**Thomas Merolli: Yes.**

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

**Thomas Merolli: Yes.** People's immigration status should not deny them access to a future. The best way to prevent brain drain is to give people the means to an education in this country.

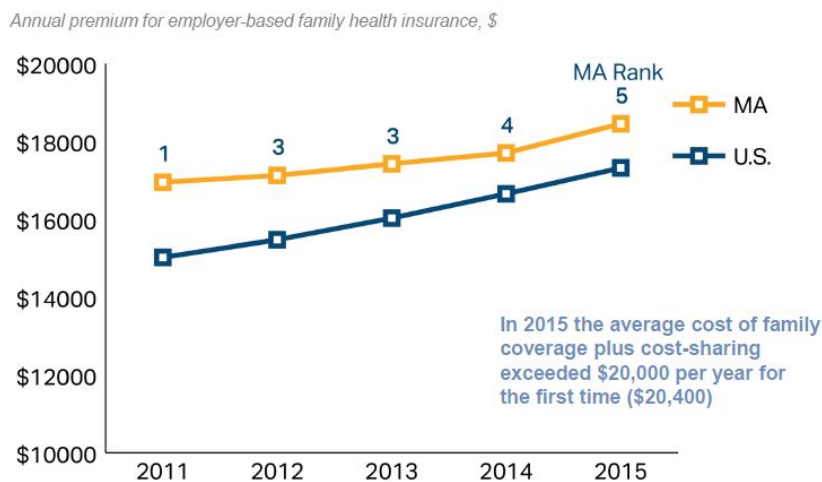
*9. **Tuition-Free Higher Education.** Would you support making tuition free at public colleges and universities?*

**Thomas Merolli: 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.*

**Thomas Merolli:** I believe health care is a right. I believe moving MA towards a single payer health care system is the best way to help control health care costs, especially for schools and local governments. The OPEB issue can be solved with a single payer health care system.

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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

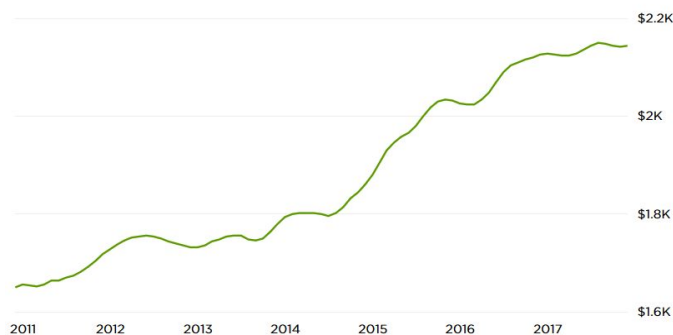


## E. HOUSING

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Massachusetts has a lot to offer, but that does little if people can't afford to live here. Although Massachusetts ranked #1 last year in the [US News & World Report's state ranking](#), we were #45 in cost of living and #44 in housing affordability. A worker earning minimum wage in Massachusetts would have to work [80 hours a week](#) to afford a modest one bedroom rental home at market rate (and almost 100 hours a week in Metro Boston). Over the last ten years, the need for affordable housing has increased, while funds for affordable housing have decreased at both federal and state levels. The Commonwealth is at risk of losing [14,231 subsidized units](#) by December 31, 2019, as subsidies expire and owners convert properties into market-rate condominiums. Half of families in Greater Boston alone pay over 30% of their income in housing and utilities costs—and over 25% of households pay more than half their income to housing. There is a waiting list of up to ten years for a rental voucher. This is unsustainable. It has led to expanding economic inequality, increased homelessness, and damage to our economy, as talented workers often leave the state for less expensive regions.

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



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

**1. Please share your personal values and principles regarding affordable housing.**

*How would you ensure that there is suitable housing for all who need it, within reasonable distance of job opportunities? How would you address the need to link housing, jobs, and transportation? How would you tackle homelessness?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Too many people are being priced out of their long time homes in my district. Housing costs are skyrocketing, and steps need to be taken to ensure that there are housing options for people that want to remain in their communities. Making resources available for communities to pursue affordable housing projects is the best way to ensure that this remains a priority in the more rural parts of the state.

I also, believe that we need a public transit system that connects the entire Commonwealth.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** I have pushed mixed use development in Mendon to allow affordable housing using CPA funding on the economic development committee.

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

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

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

b. *The Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

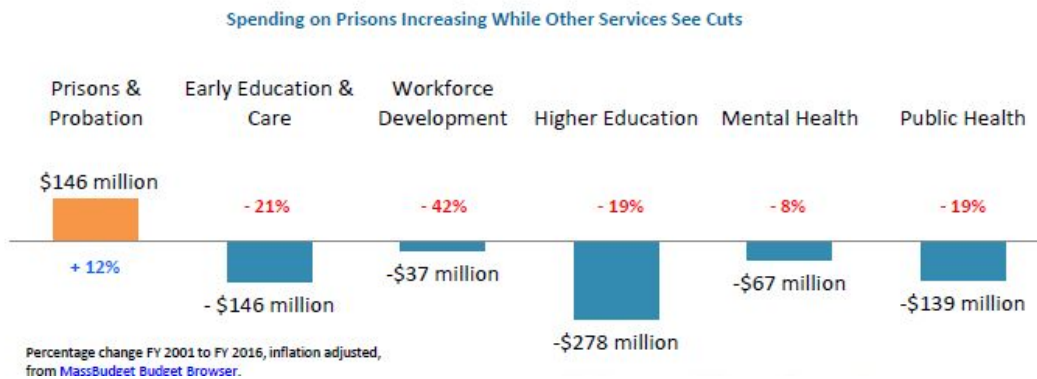
8. **Combating Speculation.** *Would you support legislation to allow cities and towns to impose a graduated tax on private real estate transactions over \$2.5 million, with the money allocated to affordable housing trust funds?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

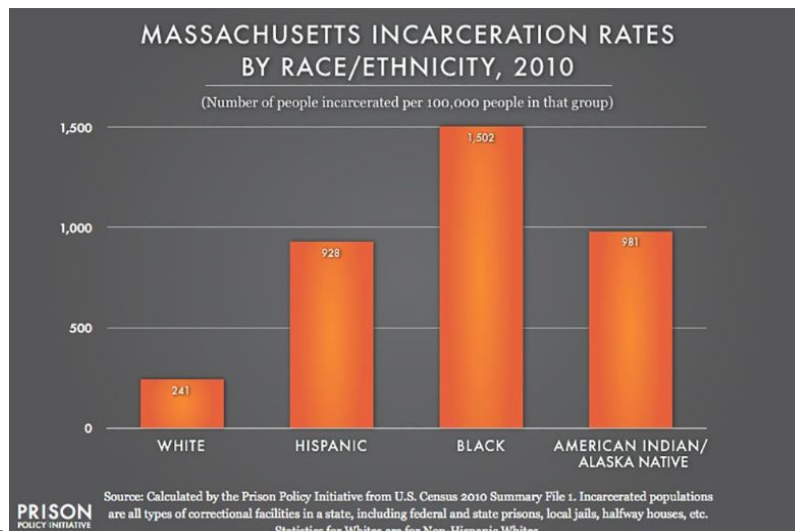
# F. RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

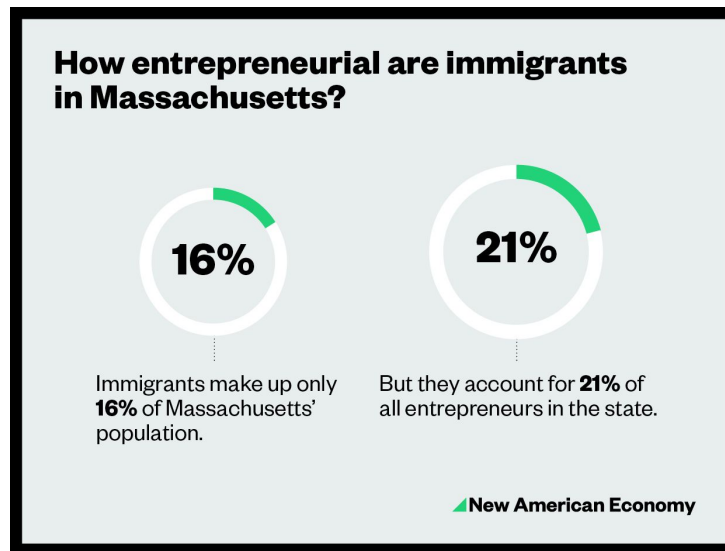
Massachusetts must continue to strive to be a state that welcomes and embraces all of its residents and combats prejudice and discrimination of all kinds. The social and economic costs of mass incarceration and the policies that created it, in particular, have put our aspirations of “justice for all”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

**Thomas Merolli:** We need to reverse the school to prison pipeline, reject the possibility of private prisons, and stop police from being forced to enforce federal immigration law.

2. *Please indicate work you personally have done to combat racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, homophobia, transphobia, and other attempts to marginalize disadvantaged groups.*
3. *Trans Accommodations. In 2016, Massachusetts passed legislation to prevent discrimination against transgender individuals in public accommodations. Conservatives are seeking to repeal the bill on the 2018 ballot. Will you advocate for the protection of this legislation?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. My opponent voted against trans civil rights.

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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. It boggles my mind that this hasn't been banned yet.

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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. We should be investing in treatment options, not pushing criminalization.

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?

**Thomas Merolli:** 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)?

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. Police should not be enforcing federal immigration law: period. My opponent highlighted his opposition to the Safe Communities Act by inviting a hate group, and sheriff Tom Hodgson to speak in Milford.

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?

**Thomas Merolli:** No.

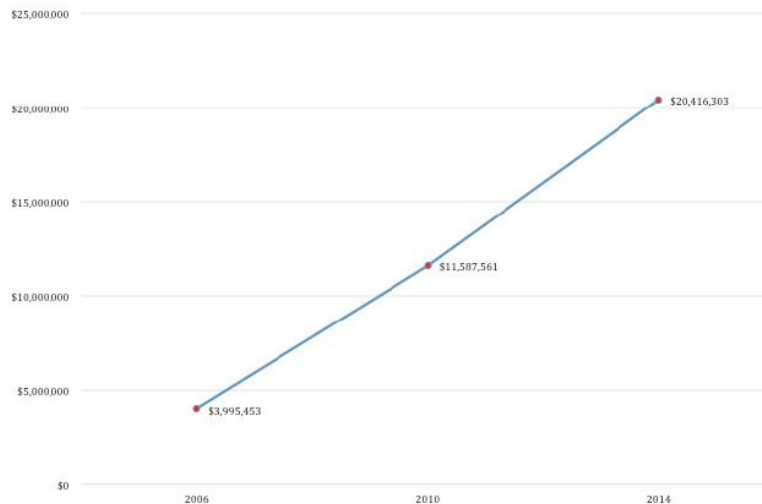
# G. GOOD GOVERNMENT/ STRONG DEMOCRACY

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

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

**Figure 1: MA Independent Expenditure Totals**



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

**Thomas Merolli:** I strongly believe Citizens United will go down in history as one of the worst decisions in the history of our Supreme Court. I truly believe a public system of elections is how we can pursue a better democracy.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** I have taken a pledge to not allow dark money organizations to assist my campaign, I signed a pledge to not take money from fossil fuel companies, and I testified in support of the We The

People Act in front of the legislature's joint committee on federal affairs.

3. **Power and the Legislature.** Concentration of power in Leadership remains a problem in the MA Legislature and has been a persistent obstacle to progress, and that power is maintained by “process” rules on how decisions are made and which legislation moves forward. Would you support the following rules changes to dilute the amount of power held by leadership in your respective branch of government...?

a. Allowing committees to appoint their own chair, instead of Leadership?

**Thomas Merolli: Yes.**

b. Allowing bills to be discharged from a committee if they have majority support in a given chamber?

**Thomas Merolli: Yes.**

c. Limiting extension orders to one per bill per committee for a maximum of 1 week in order to prevent needless delay?

**Thomas Merolli: Yes.**

4. **Transparency.** Too often, decisions that affect millions across the Commonwealth are made behind closed doors with little public input. Indeed, 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. Would you support the following efforts to increase transparency and public accountability...?

a. Eliminating the aforementioned exemption?

**Thomas Merolli: Yes.**

b. Making all committee roll call votes available to the public?

**Thomas Merolli: Yes.**

c. Making conference committees more transparent by requiring minutes to be recorded and shared with the public within 24 hours of every meeting?

**Thomas Merolli: Yes.**

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

**Thomas Merolli: 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"?

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

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

a. Election day voter registration

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

c. No-fault absentee voting

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

d. Universal voting-by-mail

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.



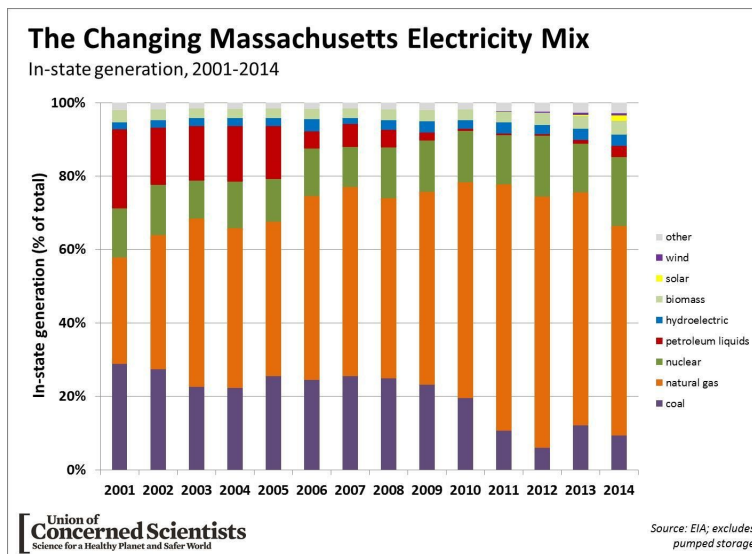
# H. SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

*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.*

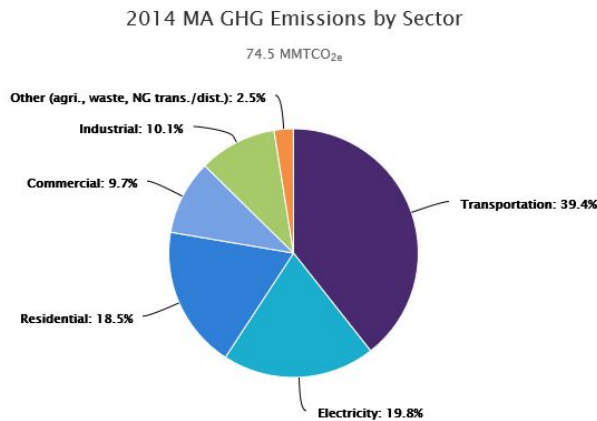
*Equity issues loom large, as low-income communities and communities of color are often the most vulnerable to natural disasters and bear the brunt of pollution. In 2014, Governor Deval Patrick signed an executive order directing all state agencies to devote resources to protect the health, safety, and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

**Thomas Merolli:** I believe that MA needs to invest in our public transportation. Our state should be a leader on this issue, and sadly is far behind.

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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. My opponent opposed this.

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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. The net metering cap needs to be abolished.

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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

We need to fix the EO so that communities like Uxbridge won't be forced to take the brunt of waste, as it has recently.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. Remove the pipeline tax!

8. **Carbon pricing.**

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

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes.

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

**Thomas Merolli:** 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?*

**Thomas Merolli:** Yes. My opponent voted against this.

# 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.*

**Thomas Merolli:** The choice is clear here.

My opponent has voted against protecting workers from wage theft, has voted against trans civil rights, invited a hate group to Milford (<http://www.metrowestdailynews.com/news/20180517/fattman-milford-selectmen-oppose-eldridges-sanctuary-state-amendment>), and has even said that undocumented immigrants who are rape victims should be afraid to come forward. <https://www.ilw.com/articles/2012,0823-Algase.shtm>

It is time for this district to be represented by someone who represents real change, and wants to push a progressive path forward.