

**PROGRESSIVE MASSACHUSETTS
2020 CONGRESSIONAL
ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**



Candidate: Jesse Mermell

Office Sought: US House Representative, MA-04

Party: Democratic

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Email questions to elections@progressivemass.com.

Questionnaire Responses (excepting sections labeled CONFIDENTIAL) will be published on our website.

I. About You

1. Why are you running for office? And what will your top 3 priority pieces of legislation if elected?

JM: I am running because the people and places we love and the progress that's so critical to the future of our country are under attack. I believe that the people of the Fourth District deserve a Congresswoman who will not only fight back against the hate and backwards thinking coming from the White House, but will also fight for the future that everyone in this district deserves.

My top priority is advancing a fair economy that benefits all residents of the 4th Congressional District, including:

- Protecting reproductive health in the face of unprecedented threats in the judiciary with a newly conservative Supreme Court,
- Leading in the fight for a national paid family in medical leave program, and
- Investing in clean energy to address our climate crisis and to create good jobs, with particular attention to making desperately needed improvements to our failing transportation system to foster equitable economic growth and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

2. What prepares you to serve in this capacity?

JM: I've built a 20-year career as a progressive fighter on issues that are critical to voters in the Fourth Congressional District. I think my professional experience working at Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts during the height of the fight to include reproductive health care in the Affordable Care Act, serving on the Brookline Select Board for six years where I partnered with community activists to tackle climate change by banning plastic bags and styrofoam at the local level, running point on the Strong Women Strong Families Initiative during my time in Governor Patrick's administration, and leading the state's progressive business community as President of the Alliance for Business Leadership, where I was one of eight voices at the table with legislative leaders negotiating what is now the strongest paid family and medical leave law in the nation, has made me uniquely qualified to go to Washington to fight for residents of the Fourth District.

3. What do you view as the biggest barriers to progressive policy on the federal level?

JM: There are multiple barriers to progressive policy making on the federal level, the most obvious being the lack of a progressive majority in the House and Senate and the lack of a progressive leader in the White House. Progressive electoral victories have been made harder by an extensive effort by conservatives to suppress the votes of minority voters, and progressive policy victories have been made harder to sustain due to a court system stacked with conservative judges. Additionally, progressives face key structural challenges in a system where 18% of the population controls 52 US Senate seats and key communications challenges in an environment where conservative leaders have made major investments in building conservative media outlets and voices of the course of decades and have used those investments to influence both elections and policy debates.

II. The Issues

Our questionnaire is based on our [Progressive Platform](#): Shared Prosperity, All Means All/Racial and Social Justice, Good Government and Strong Democracy, and Sustainable Infrastructure and Environmental Protection.

A. An Equitable Tax System

1. *What does a progressive tax system look like? Which specific proposals would you advocate for?*

JM: A progressive tax system is one that is truly graduated and where the wealthiest among us pay their fair share. It is unjust and illogical that someone who inherits great wealth or works the C-Suite pays less in taxes than a person who labors up to 80 hours a week across our economy.

I support Senator Warren's proposal of a wealth tax on holdings larger than \$50 million and will also support immediately rolling back the Trump tax cuts, which only serve to benefit the wealthy cronies of the Trump administration. As President of the Alliance for Business Leadership, I was a vocal advocate for the Fair Share Amendment here in Massachusetts, working to ensure that the most fortunate among us pay their fair share in order to make much needed investments in transportation and education across Massachusetts.

B. Jobs That Pay a Living Wage

1. **Minimum Wage.** *The gap between productivity and wages has grown dramatically since 1973. Moreover, the federal minimum wage remains stuck at \$7.25—what it was in 2009. Would you support legislation to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour?*

JM: YES.

- a. *And eliminate the sub-minimum wage for tipped workers? **YES.***
- b. *And index the minimum wage to inflation? **YES.***

JM: "During my time at the Alliance for Business Leadership, I led the progressive business community in supporting an increase in the minimum wage to \$15/hour and, at the request of the state Legislature, represented the progressive business community in the negotiations around what is now the strongest paid family and medical leave law in the nation - sitting on the same side of the table as labor and social justice organizations.

2. **Retirement Security.** *With the decline of pensions and other defined-benefit retirement plans in the workplace, retirement is becoming more insecure, and seniors are having to work longer just to stay afloat. Would you support legislation to....*
 - a. *Increase the benefits provided by Social Security? **YES.***
 - b. *Raising the cap on earnings that are taxed for Social Security? (Currently, only earnings up to \$118,500 are subject to the payroll tax.) **YES.***
3. **Paid Leave.** *The US is the only industrial nation without paid family leave. Would you support federal legislation ensuring that workers can take up to 12 weeks of paid leave for a pregnancy, the birth or adoption of a child, to recover from a serious illness, or to care for a seriously ill family member?*

JM: YES.

4. **Union Rights.** *Unions play a key role in building a strong middle-class; however, unions have been under attack in recent years. Would you support the following efforts to strengthen the role of unions in our economy:*
 - a. *Prohibiting “right-to-work” laws at the state level? **YES.***
 - b. *Requiring employers to recognize a union when a majority of workers in a bargaining unit sign valid authorization cards? **YES.***
 - c. *Prohibiting employers from interfering with unionization efforts, such as by compelling worker attendance at anti-union meetings? **YES.***

JM: "As a former AFSCME 93 member, I know the importance of supporting and protecting organized labor and will continue fighting for the needs of working and middle-class families in Washington.

Please use this space to share any other principles or proposals on this issue.

C. Quality, Affordable Health Care

1. **Medicare for All.** *Would you support the creation of a single payer/“Medicare for All” health insurance system in the country that would guarantee health care as a right?*

JM: YES.

On day one in Congress, I will join the Single Payer Caucus. Americans are drowning in health care costs and Medicare for All is the best solution. However, if it is not immediately politically possible to pass Medicare for All, we must make meaningful progress that will help bring down costs of care and of prescription drugs and ensure access to quality care for everyone, while continuing the long term fight for Medicare for All.

2. **Prescription Drug Prices.** *Prescription drug prices in the US are consistently higher than in other countries. Which policies would you support to lower the cost of prescription drugs?*

- a. *Allowing Medicare to negotiate prices with pharmaceutical companies?* **YES.**
 - b. *Allowing patients, pharmacists, and wholesalers to buy low-cost prescription drugs from Canada and other industrialized countries?* **YES.**
 - c. *Allowing the federal government to manufacture lower-cost generic versions of prescription drugs when the market does not offer them?* **YES.**
3. **Reproductive Rights.** Would you support repealing the Hyde Amendment, which bars the use of federal funds to pay for abortion except to save the life of the woman, or if the pregnancy arises from incest or rape?

JM: YES.

The first policy proposal of my campaign was on reproductive health. Reproductive rights are under attack and I'm going to do everything in my power to protect them - just as I have my entire career, including as VP for External Affairs at Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts. Being pro-choice isn't just a position I hold, it represents work I've done and progress I've fought for over the past 20 years. I'm the only candidate in this race to release a comprehensive plan for reproductive rights. Reproductive health care must be affordable and accessible for all people. Here's my plan: Codify Roe v Wade in federal law to ensure Americans are protected in the event of a Supreme Court ruling that rolls back the rights and protections of Roe. This legislation must protect both the rights of providers and patients. Repeal the Hyde Amendment to remove barriers to accessing care, particularly for low-income people and people of color. Rescue Title X from the Trump Administration and fully fund it. Keep federal money out of Crisis Pregnancy Centers, which are fake health centers that aim to prevent people considering abortion care from receiving that care. There are three Crisis Pregnancy Centers in the Fourth District— in Attleboro, Fall River, and Taunton. I visited two of these Centers this week to underscore the importance of ensuring that public dollars don't fund their lies. Fund comprehensive sex education programs, such as the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) and the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) Program. End the global gag rule by supporting the Global Health, Empowerment, and Rights (HER) Act and seek to restore American leadership on free speech and women's health throughout the world.

4. **Opioid Crisis.** An essential part of addressing the opioid crisis, safe consumption sites allow medical professionals to respond to overdoses and engage participants in medical and behavioral health services. Would you support the legalization of SCSs?

JM: YES.

Please use this space to share any other principles or proposals on this issue.

D. Quality, Free Publicly Funded Education

1. **Education Equity.** *More than six and a half decades out from the Brown vs. Board Supreme Court ruling, our public education systems remain highly segregated and unequal. Please name three policies you would advocate for in order to address this.*

JM: We need to work with state officials to address equity in the K-12 system by reducing the expansion of charter schools, reducing the reliance on high-stakes testing, and fighting back at the federal level on this issue of segregation.

2. **Charter School Funding.** *The NAACP has proposed a moratorium on public funds for charter school expansion until a national audit has been completed to determine the impact of charter growth in each state. Do you support such a moratorium?*

JM: YES.

3. **Charter School Accountability.** *Do you support requiring that charter schools comply with the same transparency and accountability requirements as public schools?*

JM: YES.

4. **High-Stakes Testing.** *Do you support prohibiting the use of standardized testing as a primary or significant factor in closing a school, firing a teacher, or making any other high-stakes decisions?*

JM: YES.

As the former Executive Director of FairTest, a non-profit dedicated to ending the flaws and misuses of high-stakes standardized testing in public schools and for college admissions, I feel passionately about moving our educational system away from the biased and unjust emphasis on high stakes standardized testing and about making higher education accessible and equitable to students of all backgrounds. I will continue to do that work in Washington.

5. **Student Loan Debt.** *Student loan debt is holding back the economy, as graduates are unable to make important long-term investments in their future. Presidential candidates have put forth various schemes to forgive student loan debt. Do you support doing so, and what would your ideal scheme look like?*

JM: YES.

We need to provide debt relief to our students with all the possible tools available including loan forgiveness, providing oversight on interest rates, and making it easier to refinance. We need to fight Betsy DeVos' efforts to block students from getting the debt relief they deserve and fight the growth of predatory, for-profit colleges that prey on students and leave them drowning in debt. We must also ensure that FAFSA and other financial aid applications are made more accessible to all students.

6. **Tuition-Free Higher Education.** *More and more jobs are requiring a college degree, but the cost of higher education has been growing faster than wages, contributing to a ballooning student debt burden. Would you support legislation to guarantee free tuition at public colleges and universities?*

JM: YES.

I support free tuition at community college and public technical schools. We must explore ways to get 4-year public colleges and universities to a place where it is accessible and affordable for all who want it including free tuition, increasing Pell Grants, making larger state and federal investments in public colleges and universities to shift the burden away from students and their families and address the college affordability crisis, and ensure for-profit colleges that engage in predatory and fraudulent practices are held accountable.

Please use this space to share any other principles or proposals on this issue.

E. Affordable, Decent Housing

1. **Tenant Rights.** *Would you support legislation to establish a national just cause eviction standard, which would limit the grounds upon which a landlord may evict a tenant?*

JM: YES.

2. **Inclusive Communities.** *Federal funding can be a major source of leverage in shaping state and municipal policy. Would you support legislation to tie transportation or housing funding to...*

a. *Ending exclusionary zoning practices?* **YES.**

b. *Repealing state prohibitions on rent stabilization policies?* **YES.**

3. **Public Housing.** *Would you support the repeal of the Faircloth Amendment, which bans HUD from funding the construction or operation of new public housing units beyond the total that existed in 1999?*

JM: YES.

Please use this space to share any other principles or proposals on this issue.

JM: As President of the Alliance for Business Leadership I was proud to lead on engaging the progressive business community in advocating for increases in affordable and middle income housing. We developed a four-part learning series for progressive business leaders to understand the history of housing policy in Massachusetts - in particular the history of bias and discrimination - and to use their voices in the

community to support zoning changes and additional investments that would increase affordable and middle income housing in the Commonwealth.

F. A Fair and Efficient Criminal Justice System

1. **Ending Mass Incarceration.** *The past few years have seen a growing recognition that the “tough on crime” legislation passed in the 1980s and 1990s has had a devastating impact on communities of color and has not improved public safety. Which of the following proposals do you support?*
 - a. *Legalizing marijuana? **YES.***
 - b. *Repealing mandatory minimums for non-violent drug offenses? **YES.***
 - c. *Eliminating cash bail, so that no one is held in jail solely for an inability to pay? **YES.***
 - d. *Abolishing the death penalty? **YES.***
 - e. *Eliminating the sentence of life without parole, which has been proven to have significant racial disparities ? **YES.***
 - f. *Barring the federal government and state and local jurisdictions from contracting with private corporations to run prisons and detention facilities? **YES.***
2. **Prison Conditions.** *In addition to having incarceration rates that far [outpace](#) those of other countries, the US is known for violating both domestic and international law in the conditions of its prisons. Which of the following steps would you support to emphasize the rehabilitative, as opposed to punitive, nature of the system and protect basic rights?*
 - a. *Preventing companies from charging prisoners unreasonable fees for banking and telecommunications services? **YES.***
 - b. *Requiring that incarcerated individuals be paid for their work at a rate no lower than the federal minimum wage? **YES.***
 - c. *Restoring Pell Grant access to prisoners? **YES.***
 - d. *Limiting the use of solitary confinement to no more than 15 consecutive days, beyond which it is defined as torture by the United Nations? **YES.***
3. **Police Accountability.** *Lax or nonexistent systems of accountability and perverse incentives at the federal, state, and local level, combined with a legacy of systemic racism, too often lead to law enforcement neither enforcing the law nor keeping the public safe. Which of the following steps would you support to promote a more humane, community-focused policing?*

- a. *Prohibiting the transfer of military weapons from the federal government to state and local law enforcement? **YES.***
- b. *Eliminating qualified immunity, which allows law enforcement to violate people's constitutional rights with impunity? **YES.***
- c. *Restricting the use of civil asset forfeiture by police departments and prosecutors' offices? **YES.***

Please use this space to share any other principles or proposals on this issue.

G. A Humane Immigration System

1. **Comprehensive Immigration Reform.** *The approximately 12 million undocumented immigrants in the US are important contributors to strong economies and strong communities. Due to political and economic instability abroad, as well as a labyrinthine and discriminatory immigration bureaucracy at home, this number could very well continue to grow. However, comprehensive immigration reform legislation has remained elusive in Washington. Which of the following policies would you support?*
 - a. *The DREAM Act, which would allow certain US-raised immigrant youth to earn lawful permanent residence and American citizenship? **YES.***
 - b. *A path for undocumented immigrants to gain US citizenship? **YES.***
 - c. *Repealing the three-year, ten-year, and permanent bars of reentry for undocumented immigrants? **YES.***
 - d. *Decriminalizing border crossing? **YES.***
2. **Upholding Rights, Ending Perverse Incentives.** *Every day, we hear new unconscionable stories about how the US is treating immigrants at the border, fueled by both bad laws and lawlessness at the federal level. Our immigration system should reflect our values. Which of the following policies would you support?*
 - a. *Ending the practice of family detention? **YES.***
 - b. *Ending the practice of family separation? **YES.***
 - c. *Ending ICE's daily bed quota? **YES.***
 - d. *Imposing a moratorium on the construction of new detention facilities? **YES.***
 - e. *Abolishing ICE? **YES.***

3. **Ending Mass Deportations.** *Would you support a moratorium on deportations until a comprehensive immigration reform bill is passed?*

JM: YES.

4. **Refugees.** *In October of 2019, the number of refugees resettled in the US hit zero, and the Trump administration would like to keep it that way going forward, abandoning historic humanitarian commitments. What do you see as the appropriate number of refugees for the US to accept each year?*

JM: The United States is a nation of refugees, fleeing persecution and violence to make new lives for themselves and their families here. First and foremost, we must welcome refugees because it is a moral imperative. Additionally, immigrants and refugees make significant cultural and economic contributions to our nation. Welcoming new Americans is good for our economy and enriches our communities with diversity, and as President of the Alliance for Business Leadership I was a reliable ally for the immigrant community on everything from the expansion of H1B visas, to the Global Entrepreneur in Residence Program, to standing up for immigrants in Massachusetts with Temporary Protected Status. America should welcome as many new Americans as we can reasonably screen to ensure that we have a safe and secure process.

Please use this space to share any other principles or proposals on this issue.

H. A Diverse and Welcoming Society

1. **LGBTQ Rights.** *Over the past several years, we have seen numerous states try to deny trans individuals the right to exist in public spaces as well as conservative lawsuits seeking to legalize discrimination against LGBTQ individuals. Would you support legislation to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the Civil Rights Act of 1964?*

JM: YES.

2. **Reparations.** *Would you support legislation to create a commission to study the impact of slavery on the social, political, and economic life of the US and propose appropriate remedies (such as HR40)?*

JM: YES.

3. **Sexual Harassment.** *Would you support legislation to end the use of forced arbitration clauses in sexual harassment cases?*

JM: YES.

4. **Gun Violence Prevention.** *The US has the largest number of guns per capita in the world--and consequently one of the highest rates of gun deaths. For too long, the federal*

government has refused to play a constructive role in preventing gun violence. Which of the following proposals would you advocate for?

- a. Reinstating the federal assault weapons ban? **YES.***
- b. Banning high-capacity magazine ammunitions? **YES.***
- c. Requiring a license to purchase a gun? **YES.***
- d. Limiting the number of guns an individual can buy to one per month? **YES.***
- e. Repealing the Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act, which shields the gun industry from lawsuits? **YES.***

JM: On gun violence, I will fight tooth and nail against the NRA to pass legislation that prevents any weapon intended for a battlefield from getting into the hands of people who will use it to kill our friends, neighbors, and children, implements universal background checks, keeps guns out of the hands of domestic abusers and convicted criminals and holds gun manufacturers accountable for shootings.

Please use this space to share any other principles or proposals on this issue.

JM: On issues of championing our diversity and equity, I have been proud to use my platform and voice to advocate for progressive social change in my various roles. For example, during my tenure at the Alliance for Business Leadership, I was proud to have led the business community in supporting Equal Pay in Massachusetts, to have supported the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, and to have campaigned in support of Question 3 in 2018 to protect the transgender community from discrimination.

I. Good Government and Strong Democracy

1. **Comprehensive Democracy Reform.** *Will you commit to voting on HR 1, the For The People Act, as introduced in 2018? Among other things, HR1 (“For the People Act”) contains automatic voter registration, Election Day Registration, the expansion of early voting, the prohibition of partisan gerrymandering, and other vital reforms.*

JM: YES.

2. **Ending Prison Disenfranchisement.** *Currently, Maine and Vermont are the only states that provide full suffrage to the incarcerated. Do you support ending the disenfranchisement for those currently incarcerated?*

JM: YES.

3. **Ranked Choice Voting.** *Do you support the 2020 ballot initiative to adopt ranked choice voting for state, county, and (non-presidential) federal elections?*

JM: NO.

We do not have a position on this as this is off the ballot.

4. **Campaign Finance -- Part I.** *Do you support public financing of Congressional elections?*

JM: YES.

I have given a presentation at an academic conference on a specific proposal for campaign finance reform, which is quadratic matching funds public : private. This system would amplify small donors while reducing the influence of big donors. It is based on a paper by Glen Weyl.

5. **Campaign Finance -- Part II.** *Would you support a constitutional amendment to overturn the Citizens United decision and allow limits on corporate political spending?*

JM: YES.

Please use this space to share any other principles or proposals on this issue.

J. Sustainable Infrastructure & Environmental Protection

1. **Green New Deal.** *Do you support the concept of a Green New Deal? If so, what should it look like?*

JM: YES.

A Green New Deal will make the progress that is demanded in this time of crisis, while creating new jobs and tackling economic inequality. With the current proposal, the US can achieve 100 percent clean and renewable energy in 10 years, implement a federal jobs guarantee, and provide job training and new economic development to communities that rely on the fossil fuel industry to sustain their economies. Particularly for the 4th Congressional District this must include a strong commitment to the development of offshore wind, which will hasten our transition away from fossil fuels and create valuable job opportunities off the South Coast of Massachusetts, and must include a commitment to significant investments in public transit. Transportation is the single biggest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Massachusetts and in order to truly tackle climate change and create jobs a Green New Deal must incorporate extensive and just investments in transit. A Green New Deal must also prioritize Project Labor Agreements wherever appropriate, in order to protect and advance union jobs in the Commonwealth.

2. **Transitioning to Clean Energy.** *We need to rapidly decarbonize our economy if we are to keep global warming within safe levels. Which of the following policies would you support to accelerate that transition?*
- Setting a goal of 100 percent clean energy generation and use by 2035? **YES.***
 - Putting a price on carbon emissions and investing the revenue in clean energy and green infrastructure? **YES.***

- c. *Prohibiting new leases for coal, oil, and gas on all federal lands and waters?*
YES.
- d. *Opposing any legislation that authorizes, or expedites the permitting or approval of, new fossil fuel pipelines?* **YES.**

JM: Yes, we need to commit to these measures while ensuring we are focusing on creating green economy jobs that are under project labor agreements with our brothers and sisters in labor.

3. **Climate Emergency.** *With rising temperatures and sea levels threatening significant harm to Massachusetts' coast, ecosystems, public health and well-being, do you support declaring a Climate Emergency to drive an aggressive response?*

JM: YES.

4. **Clean Water.** *Would you support legislation to require natural gas drillers to disclose the chemicals that go into the ground during the hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") process and to close the so-called "Halliburton loophole," which prevents the EPA from conducting rigorous oversight?*

JM: YES.

5. **Environmental Justice.** *Would you support legislation to codify environmental justice into law; require federal agencies to address environmental justice through agency actions and permitting decisions; and strengthen legal protections against environmental injustice for communities of color, low-income communities, and indigenous communities?*

JM: YES.

6. **Electric Vehicles.** *Would you support legislation to phase out the sale of gasoline- or diesel-powered vehicles by 2030?*

JM: YES.

7. **Public Transportation.** *What would be your top priorities for federal reinvestment in transportation and infrastructure if elected?*

JM: Massachusetts is being crippled by crumbling transportation infrastructure, and while all communities are harmed by this crisis it is disproportionately impacting economically disadvantaged communities that have long been cut off from reliable public transit options. I would prioritize federal reinvestment in transportation that fully and swiftly completes construction on South Coast Rail, allows for the electrification of the state's commuter rail system, supports local projects like the Attleboro Transit Center that help facilitate the increased use of public transit by riders, and increases federal funding for Regional Transit Authorities like the SRTA and GATRA.

Please use this space to share any other principles or proposals on this issue.

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.

JM: I have always been passionate about investing in transportation from both an equity and climate perspective. As a member of the Select Board in Brookline I led our effort to bring Hubway (now BlueBikes) to Brookline to encourage multi-modal transit. During my time at the Alliance for Business Leadership, I was a frequent and vocal advocate for increased (and equitably raised) investment in public transit, including water transit, buses, and the commuter rail. As a member of the Regional Rail Advisory Committee I supported the electrification of the commuter rail fleet and the advancement of South Coast Rail.