

Lowell Together **State Senate** Candidate Questionnaire Final (updated 12/08/25)

Candidate Name: Vanna Howard

1. About You

a. Your Governing Approach (Public)

i. Why are you running for office?

1. I am running for State Senate because this community saved me, and I feel a deep responsibility to give back. I was a single mom, experienced homelessness, and survived domestic violence. During the hardest moments of my life, it was this community that took me in, lifted me up, and believed in me when we needed it most. Those experiences shaped who I am and why I have dedicated my life to public service. I know firsthand what happens when systems work and the devastating consequences when they do not. As a State Representative, I have turned that lived experience into action by delivering real results for our community, including securing millions of dollars in state funding for local priorities that strengthen our schools, infrastructure, and community services. I understand how to navigate the budget process, build coalitions, and translate community needs into funded outcomes. That experience prepares me to step into the State Senate on day one, hit the ground running, and continue delivering for the people I represent. I am running to ensure no family feels invisible, that the government shows up when it matters most, and that our district has a Senator who leads with empathy, experience, and results.

ii. What are your top three priorities if elected?

1. My top priorities are affordability and housing, public safety and health, and opportunity for young people and families.

a. First, I am focused on housing and affordability because the rising cost of living is crushing working families, seniors, and first-time homebuyers. I will work to expand affordable housing options, protect long-term residents, cut taxes on working families, and hold utility companies like Eversource accountable for unjustified price hikes.

Families deserve stability and predictability in their housing and monthly costs.

b. Second, I am committed to public safety and public health.

Violence and addiction affect every community, and prevention must be part of the solution. That means investing in youth jobs, addressing the root causes of poverty, strengthening mental health and recovery services, and building trust between communities and law enforcement. I am proud to have secured funding for recovery programs like the Bridge Club, and I will continue championing mental health and addiction services in the State Senate.

c. Third, I am focused on education and quality of life. Every child deserves access to a world-class education and real opportunities to succeed. I have delivered funding for a youth innovation hub, vocational workforce programs through the Boys and Girls Club, and early childhood education. I will also continue investing in safer roads, sidewalks, parks, and infrastructure that improve daily life for families, seniors, and veterans.

iii. What prepares you to serve in this capacity?

1. My preparation comes from lived experience and proven results. I know what it means to struggle, and I also know how to make government work. As a State Representative, I have delivered millions of dollars to our district for housing, education, infrastructure, public health, and community services. I understand how to navigate the budget, build coalitions, and turn community needs into funded outcomes. That experience allows me to step into the State Senate ready to deliver on day one.

iv. How do you see yourself as similar to or different from the opponent(s)?

1. I believe leadership is about service, not politics. I am focused on solutions, results, and showing up for people every day. My approach is shaped by my lived experience and by a track record of delivering real investments for our communities. While others may focus on the politics of old and the use of attacks and other distractions, I focus on listening, building trust, and getting things done. Voters deserve a Senator who is accessible, transparent, and relentlessly focused on improving quality of life, and that is the

leadership I offer. I am presenting a vision of our district that is future focused, inclusive and built on the foundation of what we can accomplish together, rather than trying to undercut my opponent.

2. The Issues

a. Revenue, Jobs, and the Economy

i. How should we raise more revenue to adequately fund our communities for the future?

1. We must raise revenue in a way that is fair, sustainable, and focused on protecting essential public services. That means ensuring large corporations and the wealthiest individuals pay their fair share, closing corporate tax loopholes that allow profits to be hidden offshore, and responsibly using tools like the state's Rainy Day Fund when federal cuts threaten healthcare, education, and human services. I strongly oppose any budget that balances the books on the backs of working families and vulnerable communities. Our revenue system should reflect our values by investing in housing, education, healthcare, and infrastructure that benefit everyone.

ii. Do you support the concept of progressive taxation (people who earn more, pay more)? (Y/N) I voted in support of the fair share amendment and wrote an op-ed in support.

iii. Share your principles and proposals regarding creating good-paying jobs for all and reducing inequality.

1. Good-paying jobs are the foundation of strong communities. I believe jobs should provide fair wages, benefits, safe working conditions, and a path to economic stability. As a legislator, I support raising wages, strengthening labor protections, investing in workforce development, and expanding access to education and training programs tied to real career pathways. I have consistently stood with organized labor to support fair wages, collective bargaining rights, and strong public sector employment. Reducing inequality means centering working families, women, immigrants, and communities of color in our economic policies and ensuring growth benefits workers, not just corporations.

iv. How do you feel about the use of Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) in city-funded construction?

1. I support the use of Project Labor Agreements in city-funded and publicly funded construction projects. PLAs help ensure projects are completed on time and on budget while guaranteeing fair wages, strong safety standards, and local workforce participation. They are a proven tool for creating high-quality jobs, preventing labor disputes, and ensuring public investments deliver real value for workers and taxpayers.

v. What is your view about workers organizing unions?

1. I strongly support workers' right to organize unions and bargain collectively. Unions are one of the most effective tools workers have to secure fair wages, safe workplaces, and dignity on the job. I have consistently and publicly stood with workers organizing across the Commonwealth, supported legislation advancing collective bargaining rights, and will continue using my position to protect and expand workers' rights in the State Senate. A strong labor movement is essential to a fair economy and a healthy democracy.

vi. **Corporate tax breaks** cost Massachusetts more than \$1 billion in foregone revenue each year. Which of the following steps would you support?

1. Repealing any tax break that does not provide the intended benefits in a cost-effective manner? Y N

2. Establishing sunset dates for all tax breaks to require periodic review? Y N

3. Ending the current sales tax exemptions for aircraft and aircraft parts, which costs the Commonwealth approximately \$30 million each year? Y N

vii. Large multinational corporations like Amazon and Walmart hide significant profits offshore in order to avoid paying taxes here in Massachusetts and in other states. Would you support legislation to increase the amount of offshored corporate income subject to MA's corporate income tax to 50%, the maximum allowable amount and the amount taxed by most of our neighboring states? Y N

viii. Will you oppose the corporate lobby's ballot question to reduce the state income tax, a measure which would cost the state \$5 billion a year? Y N

ix. Do you support using the rainy day fund to offset federal funding cuts? Y N

x. **Livable Wages.** Although Massachusetts now has a \$15 minimum wage, that is still not a living wage in much of Massachusetts, and \$15 has lost a lot of

value due to high inflation. Do you support the following steps...?

1. Raising the minimum wage to \$20 per hour? (Y/N)
 2. Eliminating subminimum wages? (Y/N)
 3. Ensuring that the minimum wage law applies to municipal workers? (Y/N)
 4. Indexing the minimum wage to inflation? (Y/N)
- xi. **Paid Leave for Municipal Workers.** In 2018, MA passed the strongest paid family and medical leave law in the country. However, the law did not include municipal workers. Would you support extending the law to make sure that municipal workers have access to these vital benefits? (Y/N)
- xii. **Right to Strike.** Would you support legislation to legalize the right to strike for public employees (with the exception of public safety personnel) after six months of failed negotiations with their employer? (Y/N)
- xiii. **State House Unionization.** Would you support legislation to extend collective bargaining rights to State House staff? (Y/N)
- xiv. Additional Comments (optional):

b. Education

- i. Do you support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts? (Y/N)
- ii. Do you support requiring public schools to provide age-appropriate, medically accurate information that is inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities? (Y/N)
- iii. Should sex education include topics such as consent and the effective use of contraception? (Y/N)
- iv. Do you agree that K-12 education should include the teaching of accurate histories, writings, and contributions of racial and ethnic groups that have been historically underrepresented or marginalized? (Y/N)
- v. Do you agree that Massachusetts public schools should include sufficient instruction on the histories, roles, and contributions of LGBTQIA+ individuals in the history of this country and the Commonwealth? (Y/N)
- vi. **Affordable Child Care.** Would you support legislation to make child care free for low-income families and ensure that no family has to pay more than 7% of their income on child care? (Y/N)
- vii. **Universal Pre-K.** Would you support creating universal, free Pre-K, accessible to any resident of Massachusetts, integrated into the public school system? (Y/N)
- viii. **Charter Schools.** Do you support keeping the cap on charter schools? (Y/N)

ix. **Debt-Free Higher Ed.** Would you support legislation to guarantee Massachusetts residents can graduate Massachusetts' public colleges and trade schools completely free of student loan debt? (Y/N)

x. **Supporting Public Higher Ed Faculty.** Would you support ensuring that adjunct faculty and part-time staff are eligible for state healthcare and retirement benefits? (Y/N)

xi. Additional Comments (optional):

c. Healthcare

i. Please share your values, principles, and proposals regarding healthcare access and equity.

My values for health equity center on health as a human right, fairness, dignity, and eliminating unjust differences, guided by principles like universal access, affordable care, cultural competence, patient-centeredness, and addressing Social Determinants of Health (SDOH). Have supported/championed and will continue to support legislations/initiatives on dismantling systemic barriers (racism, sexism), expanding insurance coverage, community engagement, using telehealth, improving health literacy, and enacting policy changes for true "leaving no one behind" health for all.

ii. **Optional/As Applicable:** Please indicate work you personally have done to advance your principles on health care (legislation, community work, published writings, etc.). Served on Committee on Public Health (2 terms), served on Lowell Community Health Center, executive leadership staff of Lowell Community Health Center. Proposed and supported several legislations to advance health care. Hosted Ellie Fund in Lowell regarding education awareness on health and resources for breast cancer patients. Wrote an op-ed on the importance of passing the Fair Share Amendment. Currently serving a second term on the Massachusetts Caucus of Legislators Leadership Team. (see legislative priorities related to health care: [Legislative Priorities — Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators](#))

Host annually the Project Period Care Drive to support students and staff of Middlesex Community College and UMass Lowell.

iii. **Single Payer.** Would you support legislation to enact a single payer health care system in Massachusetts, which would guarantee health insurance as a right? (Y/N)

iv. **Full Spectrum Pregnancy Care.** Would you support requiring health

insurance plans to cover all pregnancy care (including prenatal care, childbirth, and postpartum care), without any kind of cost-sharing, building on the recent mandate to require coverage for abortion and abortion-related care? (Y/N)

v. **Abortion Access: Parental Consent.** Young people under sixteen seeking an abortion must obtain parental consent or judicial authorization. Would you support repealing this restriction on young people's access to abortion? (Y/N) There ought to be some pathway for a child in that situation to get a safe abortion whether or not her parents consent, she should not be made to give birth if she recognizes she's not capable of being a mother at her age. For minors in abusive or unsupportive homes, repealing the law reduces the risk of family violence or retaliation that can occur if a pregnancy is disclosed against their will. It would align abortion with other pregnancy-related care—such as prenatal care and childbirth—for which minors in Massachusetts already have the right to self-consent.

vi. **Abortion Access: Expanding Access.** Would you support expanding abortion access after 24 weeks of pregnancy when in the best professional judgement of a licensed physician? (Y/N)

vii. **Anti-Abortion Centers.** In Massachusetts, anti-abortion centers (also known as crisis pregnancy centers) outnumber abortion clinics by more than 2 to 1. Would you commit to opposing any Massachusetts government support and funding for such centers? (Y/N)

viii. **Overdose Prevention Centers.** Overdose prevention centers allow medical professionals to respond to overdoses and engage participants in medical and behavioral health services. Would you support the legalization of overdose prevention centers? (Y/N)

ix. **Vaccination.** Would you support legislation to eliminate non-medical exemptions to the routine vaccines for children required for school entry, as our neighbors in Maine, Connecticut, and New York have already done? (Y/N)

x. Additional Comments (optional):

d. Housing

i. Please share your principles and proposals regarding housing affordability in Greater Lowell.

1. Housing affordability in Greater Lowell requires urgent action. I

believe housing is foundational to stability and opportunity, and families should be able to stay in the communities they helped build. My focus is on expanding affordable and workforce housing by partnering with municipalities and developers, streamlining permitting, and directing state resources to local projects. As a State Representative, I have secured millions for housing and community development, and I will continue bringing funding to Greater Lowell in the State Senate. I also support protecting renters and long-term residents by giving cities and towns tools to prevent displacement, stabilize rents, and stop unjust evictions, while balancing the needs of small landlords. In addition, I will work to lower housing-related costs by holding utilities accountable for rate hikes and expanding relief for seniors through programs like property tax work-off options. My lived experience as a single mom who experienced homelessness keeps me focused on results. In the State Senate, I will fight to keep Greater Lowell affordable, stable, and inclusive for working families, seniors, veterans, and young people.

ii. Massachusetts is the only state with a right to shelter—that is, all families experiencing homelessness are guaranteed shelter. Would you oppose any effort to roll back the right to shelter? (Y/N)

iii. Will you seek funding for more addiction recovery and mental health beds in Greater Lowell? (Y/N)

iv. How will you address the needs of the unhoused population of Greater Lowell?

1. My focus begins with housing first strategies that move people quickly into stable, permanent housing with the supports they need to succeed. As a State Representative, I have secured funding for transitional housing, behavioral health services, and community organizations that provide direct support to people experiencing homelessness. In the State Senate, I will continue to bring resources to Greater Lowell to expand shelter capacity, supportive housing, and prevention programs that keep people from falling into homelessness in the first place. I also believe we must strengthen wraparound services, including mental health care, substance use treatment, workforce support, and case management, so people can stabilize and rebuild their lives. This means sustained investment in community-based providers who

know the needs of the population and have earned trust. Finally, my approach is informed by lived experience. I know what it means to face housing insecurity, and I will always center policies on dignity, access to services, and measurable outcomes. My goal is to ensure fewer people experience homelessness in Greater Lowell and that those who do are met with real pathways to stability and housing.

v. Do you agree with a Housing First approach to fighting homelessness? (Y/N)

vi. Do you agree with Lowell's unhoused encampment sweeps? (Y/N)

vii. **Welcoming New Neighbors.** Would you support efforts to locate both long-term housing and short-term shelter in your district? (Y/N)

viii. **Local Option Real Estate Transfer Fee.** Would you support enabling all cities and towns the flexibility to design and pass real estate transfer fees that will be effective in their municipalities to raise money for affordable housing production? (Y/N)

ix. **Green and Affordable Communities.** Would you support doubling the current Deeds Excise Tax (from \$4.56 per \$1,000 to \$9.12 per \$1,000), upon the sale of real estate in Massachusetts, to create a new funding stream to be split evenly between affordable housing and climate resiliency? (Y/N)

x. **Rent Control.** Massachusetts residents face some of the highest and fastest-growing rents in the country. Would you support lifting the statewide ban on rent control and enabling cities and towns to pass rent stabilization ordinances to limit annual rent increases? (Y/N). *It has been tried in many cities across the U.S. I'm looking for a permanent solution. I'm not sure if the current plan would solve the housing crisis. There has to be a better solution. I'm in favor of increasing housing units by marking the supply available, and the rents go down. The 1% that own or control virtually all our livable land pay nothing for the privilege we've allowed. We need to break their iron grip and have them pay a fair share for change.*

xi. **Tenant Opportunity to Purchase.** Would you support providing tenants of small, medium, and large multifamily properties with the right of first refusal when the owner plans to put a building on the market? (Y/N)

xii. **Right to Counsel.** Would you support legislation to provide legal representation for low-income tenants in eviction proceedings? (Y/N)

xiii. **HDIP Reform.** The Housing Development Incentive Program (HDIP) is a multimillion-dollar annual state tax credit program subsidizing market-rate housing in Gateway Cities. Would you support reforming this program to support both market-rate and affordable housing development? (Y/N)

xiv. **Social Housing.** Social housing is state financed, mixed-income housing, owned by a local or regional housing authority. Would you support the establishment of a mixed-income social housing production program? (Y/N)

xv. **MBTA Communities Law Enforcement.** Would you support measures to strengthen the law with stricter consequences for municipalities that refuse to comply, including voiding non-compliant zoning? (Y/N)

xvi. Additional Comments (optional):

e. Zoning Reform

- i. Do you support zoning reforms to increase housing production and create more affordable and environmentally sustainable communities? (Y/N)
- ii. Do you support creating a streamlined process for turning vacant land and commercial properties into multi-family housing? (Y/N)
- iii. Do you support enabling communities to adopt inclusionary zoning ordinances (i.e., requirements that a certain percentage of new units in a development be affordable) by simple majority vote? (Y/N)
- iv. Additional Comments (optional):

f. Police Accountability and Decarceration

- i. Please share your principles and proposals regarding police accountability and decarceration.
 1. Public safety and accountability go hand in hand. I believe in building trust through transparency, clear standards, and meaningful oversight, while also investing upstream to prevent harm before it happens. That means supporting strong accountability systems, body camera implementation, and independent review when misconduct occurs, alongside expanding diversion programs, mental health response teams, and substance use treatment. We reduce incarceration by addressing root causes like housing instability, and poverty.
- ii. Do you support restorative justice for Massachusetts? (Restorative justice is a philosophical approach to wrongdoing that focuses on the needs of the victim and the offender, as well as the involved community. It is based on a theory of justice that considers crime and wrongdoing to be an offense against

- relationships, rather than the state or institution.) (Y/N)
- iii. Should municipal police departments cooperate with ICE beyond what the law requires? (Y/N)
- iv. **Police Accountability.** The 2020 police accountability law passed by the Massachusetts Legislature contained a number of steps forward, but important measures were left out. Would you support legislation to do the following:
1. Eliminating qualified immunity for state and local police and correctional officers so that individuals whose constitutional rights are violated can have their fair day in court? (Y/N)
 2. Enacting the recommendations from the special legislative commission on facial recognition, to implement privacy, civil rights, and due process protections to govern police use of the technology? (Y/N)
- v. **Sentencing Reform.** The 2018 criminal justice reform bill was an important first step in reducing mass incarceration. . Do you support the following reforms:
1. Eliminating mandatory minimums for all drug offenses? (Y/N)
 2. Raising the age of criminal majority from 18 to 21, in line with research that shows that young offenders served by a juvenile system are much less likely to reoffend? (Y/N)
 3. Decriminalizing consensual sexual activity between adolescents, by creating an exception to the statutory rape law for youth close in age? Massachusetts is one of only three states that criminalizes consensual sexual activity between two adolescents. (Y/N)
 4. Eliminating the sentence of life without parole, which is costly and has been shown to be racist in its application? (Y/N)
- vi. **Prison Accountability.** Would you commit to using your statutory right to make visits to State Correctional Facilities , whether unannounced or scheduled? (Y/N)
- vii. **Solitary Confinement.** Would you support legislation to establish universal conditions of confinement standards applicable to all people in Massachusetts state prisons, county jails, and houses of correction, regardless of housing or security status? (Y/N)
- viii. **Prison Moratorium.** Would you support a moratorium on the construction of new prisons and jails in the Commonwealth? (Y/N)
- ix. **Keeping Families Connected.** Would you support eliminating the arbitrary, unnecessary restrictions on visitation rights in prisons and jails? (Y/N)

- x. **Clean Slate.** The Massachusetts court system maintains a database of name-based court arraignment records, referred to as Massachusetts Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI). Many people are trapped in poverty and shut out of jobs and housing because of the difficult process to expunge their records, even for cases that did not end in a conviction or occurred when they were minors. Would you support:
1. Requiring the Commissioner of Probation to automatically seal criminal and juvenile records after the applicable waiting periods without requiring individuals to file a petition to do so? (Y/N)
 2. Requiring the immediate sealing of a criminal offense if the charge did not end in a conviction? (Y/N)
- xi. **Gun Violence Prevention.** Will you vote YES to protect the 2024 gun safety bill on the ballot in November 2026? (Y/N)
- xii. Additional Comments (optional):

g. A Welcoming Society

- i. How can the district support its communication with people who speak little or no English?
1. Language should never be a barrier to accessing services or participating in democracy. I support expanding translation and interpretation services across state agencies, schools, and courts, and ensuring that public information is proactively shared in the languages spoken in our community. In Greater Lowell, that also means working closely with immigrant and refugee organizations that residents already trust to ensure communication is clear, culturally competent, and accessible.
- ii. What steps would you take, if elected, to engage all of the diverse communities of Greater Lowell in policy-making?
1. I did not grow up with access to power or to decision-makers. I learned first hand that far too often policies are made without input from the people most affected by them. That experience shapes how I govern. I believe policymaking must start with listening, especially to communities that have historically been left out. I will continue to hold community meetings, show up in neighborhoods, and partner with faith leaders, cultural organizations, labor, and nonprofits across Greater Lowell. Every voter that I meet, immediately gets access to me and even my personal cell phone number. Engagement must be ongoing, multilingual, and rooted in

respect for lived experience.

iii. What past actions of yours should give voters confidence that you will follow through with representing their interests?

1. My life story and my record show that I follow through. As a newcomer to Lowell, I built relationships by doing the work and showing up for people. Before serving in the Legislature, I helped residents navigate housing challenges, immigration issues, and veterans services. In office, I have delivered funding for mental health and recovery services, youth workforce programs, education initiatives, and local infrastructure. I understand how much it means when the government works, because I know how hard it is when it does not.

iv. How do you feel about the increased ICE presence here in the Merrimack Valley?

1. As an immigrant, I am deeply concerned by the fear created by increased ICE activity in our communities. No one should be afraid to send their child to school, go to work, or seek medical care. Public safety is undermined when families live in fear of separation. I support protecting due process, upholding constitutional rights, and ensuring state and local resources are not used in ways that erode trust between residents and public institutions. Massachusetts should be a place where people are treated with dignity and humanity.

v. Additional Comments (optional):

h. Accessibility

i. Do you agree that mental, cognitive, and developmental disabilities are equally as important as physical disabilities? Y N

ii. How would you create a community and infrastructure that is inclusive and accommodating toward those in the disabled community?

iii. Do you support making mental and physical health services easily available to the public? Y N

iv. How would you make jobs and higher education more accessible to those in the disability community?

1. I believe inclusion must be intentional. Just as language and culture can create barriers, so can inaccessible infrastructure and services. I support investing in accessible housing, transportation, and public spaces, and ensuring accessibility standards are

enforced. Policymaking should include people with disabilities from the start, not as an afterthought. Everyone deserves the opportunity to live independently, work, and fully participate in community life.

v. Do you agree that disability social security and its income cap should be raised to match inflation? (Y/N)

vi. Do you support indexing disability social security income to the cost of living? (Y/N)

vii. Additional Comments (optional):

i. Sustainable Infrastructure and Environmental Protection i. Please

explain your principles and proposals relative to sustainable infrastructure and environmental protection.

1. Coming from a background where stability was not guaranteed, I understand the importance of building systems that protect people over the long term. I support sustainable infrastructure investments that reduce pollution, lower energy costs, and prepare our communities for climate impacts. That includes clean energy, resilient transportation, safe water infrastructure, and protecting open space. Environmental protection must center on environmental justice, ensuring that communities that have borne the greatest burdens see real benefits from the transition to a cleaner economy.

ii. Do you support Lowell's target of sourcing electricity from 100% renewable energy sources by 2035? (Y/N)

iii. Would you support legislation to create permanent incentives for siting solar projects where they have the least environmental impact, i.e., on buildings and disturbed land? (Y/N)

iv. Do you oppose the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure? (Y/N)

v. Do you agree that corporations should pay damages to communities adversely affected by the corporations' emissions and pollution? (Y/N)

vi. Do you support making public transit fare-free? (Y/N)

vii. Additional Comments (optional):