



PROGRESSIVE MASSACHUSETTS
2024 County Office
QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate: James Doherty

Office Sought: Essex County Clerk of Courts

Party: Democratic

Website: <https://votedoherty4clerk.com/>

Email questions to elections@progressivemass.com.

About Your Candidacy

1. Why are you running for this office? What are your top three priorities if elected?

I am a candidate FOR the Essex County Clerk of Courts. I see what I am doing more as I am in “competition” for an important position, rather than “running” against anyone else for office. Competition provides for the introduction of new people, offering new ideas and new perspectives. Competition makes for stronger candidates and for more informed choices among voters. Promoting choices, rather than limiting them, has always been good for democracy.

My top three priorities are:

- #1. To help put a spotlight on the “why” most people are in court in the first place.
- #2. To change the position of Clerk from an elected one to an appointed one.
- #3. Term-limits for the office of Clerk of Courts.

2. What prepares you to serve in this office?

I've been fortunate to have had many diverse career experiences. I have developed significant legal and procedural experience both as an attorney and serving as an Assistant Clerk Magistrate for the Boston Municipal Court-Central Division. I have worked for both large and small companies, both public and private entities and nonprofit organizations. However, one of the best preparations to serve in this office has been a greater sense of empathy and respect for the human condition that I have developed through my work in emergency rooms and residential substance use treatment programs.

3. What do you think are the most significant challenges facing the office, and how do you intend to address those challenges?

I believe that one of the more significant challenges is the need to take the politics out of the court and I will work to do so. I believe that the Clerk of Courts should not be an elected position, but rather an appointed position in the same manner as Judges and Clerk Magistrates. The court should not have any political constituencies, but political campaigns can make it hard not to.

The current elective practice presents a practical barrier to many qualified individuals from serving as Clerk unless they have the time, money and political resources to run for office, which many do not.

I am also a strong advocate for term-limits for the Clerk's position. Some rely on the worn refrain, "We have term limits, they're called elections." Problem is, this tactic is typically used by longtime, entrenched incumbent politicians. The Clerk of Courts is for a six-year term. Regardless of performance or political office, no one should be able to seek a fifth, six-year term for what would be a total of thirty years, if served. Even the President of the United States has a two-term limit for a total of eight years. I will work to address these challenges through the legislative petition process and ballot initiatives.

4. What progressive policies or programs will you implement if elected?

I would expand the scope and availability of the Mental Health Courts, Veterans Courts and Homeless Court Sessions. My present work in those court sessions is the most gratifying work I do as an Assistant Clerk Magistrate. Although I believe strongly in personal accountability, we also need to be candid about the "why" behind most people being in court to begin with. In my experience, 90% of the people who appear in court, regardless of the underlying charges, are there for one of three distinct reasons: substance abuse, mental health issues, or from being on the bottom of the economic scale. In many cases it's all three.

We need to be candid and creative about addressing the underlying challenges, and it will take a collective and concentrated effort to do so. But when we do, it will eventually result in both an increase in public safety and a reduction in the habitual relapse into crime.

5. (If not an incumbent) How do you see yourself as similar to or different from your predecessor in the office you are running for?

I believe that both the incumbent and I share the same ideals and values of providing for the efficient and effective access to the Court. Where we differ is on the actual structure of the position itself. I strongly believe that the Clerk of Courts should be an appointed, not an elected position. But as it is, there should be term limits. The Court needs to avoid even the appearance of a political constituency, but having to run for elective office undermines the perceived neutrality of the Court.

6. Why should people care about this election and this office?

Well, they don't. While campaigning for this office, I have realized that most voters do not know what this position is, what it does, or who is in it. Most people do not think of the courts at all- at least until they find themselves in one. Most people who find themselves in court don't typically find themselves appearing on their best of days. Regardless of the circumstances, it is important that people should care about

this office, because everyone in court should expect to be treated with respect, compassion and dignity.

"The courts of this country should not be the places where resolution of disputes begins. They should be the places where the disputes end after alternative methods of resolving disputes have been considered and tried."

--Sandra Day O'Connor

7. If a voter asked you what this office does, how would you answer (in no more than 3 sentences)?

I like to describe the role of the Clerk's office as helping to make sure that the Courts' "trains run on time". The Clerk's office is the official "keeper of the records" with the primary responsibility of maintaining accurate and impartial records. The handling of these documents helps explain the "who, what, when, where and why" of the Superior Court's jurisdiction, which includes all felonies and civil cases over \$50,000 and other matters.

8. (As Relevant) What do you view as the role of county government in Massachusetts? To what extent would you like to see it expanded or limited?

My view is that the role of county government should be limited, not expanded. I believe that some county government positions should be changed from elective to appointed, particularly those that are part of the court itself. This I believe should include both the Clerk of Courts and the Register of Probate positions.