



PROGRESSIVE MASSACHUSETTS
2024 Governor's Council
ENDORSEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Date: April 9, 2024

Candidate: Muriel Kramer

Office Sought: Governor's Council, District 2

Party: Democrat

Website: <https://murielkramer.com>

Facebook: [Muriel Kramer for Governor's Council](#)

Email questions to elections@progressivemass.com.

Questions about Your Candidacy & Platform

1. Why are you running for Governor's Council? What has drawn you to this office in particular?

I am a licensed clinical social worker because I believe in equity, social justice, and full human rights for all. The Governor's Council is a leverage point for progress that I want to be part of to elevate the voices and needs of those who have been and continue to be oppressed by the legal system. Judges, clerk magistrates, and parole board members have real power in the system, and I am invested in challenging appointees to focus on equity, correcting for systemic racism, and thinking more broadly about restoring the people that appear before them – offering treatment, diversion, opportunities to heal and grow. We can and must think differently about justice.

I am proudly planning to focus my candidacy and my service on elevating the concerns of those who have been marginalized by our legal system and increasing equity and social justice for everyone. Now more than ever, we need new voices and new priorities represented on the Governor's Council to help right the wrongs of the system. Too many people have been hurt by the exercise of the legal system because they are poor, they are people of color, or they are sick and need treatment for SUD or mental illness (MI). We can and must do better.

We all know how important judicial appointments can be as we watch the Supreme Court lay waste to freedoms and rights we have in my lifetime fought to secure – for women, for Black, Indigenous and other People of Color, for those who identify as LGBTQIA+, and more. For justice involved individuals, the work of the Governor's Council is even more critical. In the last fifty years, the incarcerated population in MA has increased 309% with 62% of people behind bars being held pretrial ([source](#)). And while progress is being made to reduce the incarcerated population in MA, much more needs to be done.

We can and must elevate judges, clerk magistrates, and parole board appointees that understand how important it is to confront and address bias, explicitly and implicitly; how important it is to provide access to treatment, diversion, and restorative justice pathways especially for Veterans, individuals with SUD, those struggling with MI, and those who are from historically marginalized populations or simply living in poverty.

In my professional work, I use stakeholder engagement and outreach to ensure the voices of those most affected are included in the solutions we pursue and will do the same in all decisions I make on the Governor's Council including appointments and resolutions for the industrial accident review board. We need to center on the voices of those we impact with our decisions, and that is how I will frame my work on the Governor's Council. Elevating the

voices of the most marginalized is foundational to my professional work and my personal advocacy.

This is an exciting time to consider the role of the Governor's Council with Governor Healey ready to make and already making real change and positive impact; I look forward to helping further her goals and challenging her administration to do more to right the wrongs of the past.

2. What prepares you to serve in this capacity?

I have served in elected and appointed positions over the last twenty years in Hopkinton – on the Planning Board, Board of Appeals, Select Board, as the Deputy Town Moderator, and more. I understand how to pursue change while working within the structures of the established system. In my professional career as a health care consultant for those on Medicaid, Medicare and who are uninsured, I help organizations large and small manage change to improve equity and outcomes using data driven approaches and best practices that center on the consumer.

I served in the United States Military developing my leadership skills, and as a social worker I know how to support the underserved while also elevating their voices. I will research, interview, and consider all pertinent information including available data when reviewing candidates and their records. I will ask tough, respectful questions to make sure that appointments consider the impact those appointees may have on future generations. And I will dedicate the time this position needs to completely fulfill my obligations and if elected will reduce my work hours to accommodate the hours needed for this role.

3. What factors do/will you consider when determining whether an individual should be confirmed as a judge, a member of the Parole Board, or a member of any of the other boards and positions considered by the Council? How much weight/importance do you give to each of the factors you consider? Do you have any litmus tests?

If I have a litmus test, it would be if the individual seeking appointment has the ability to honestly confront their own biases, is willing to address systemic racism as a priority, and exhibits a growth mindset – a willingness to learn and continually develop personally and professionally and to consider openly changes that must be made to redress the wrongs of the past or honestly confront an issue as it presents in a way that accounts for bias and inequity. We are all works in progress, and we need appointees that fully embrace with humility that we all have so much more to learn.

I will consider experience, temperament, and career progression and record thoughtfully. I will also look to expand the pool of appointees with a commitment to expanding representation and diversity as a priority.

4. What issues do you intend to prioritize during questioning in confirmation hearings?

In my lifetime, the United States has increased its dependence on incarceration to the detriment of all, and we need to collectively lean in to fully confront this reality and course correct. The financial and human costs are ruinous. ([source](#)) I will consider the impacts of:

- Systemic racism knowing Black men are 6 times more likely to be incarcerated than white men and Latinx men 2.5 times more likely. We know that overincarceration has detrimentally impacted communities of color, and we understand the traumatization those individuals, their families, and those communities have endured. We need to honestly confront the wrongs and correct for them.
- The need for treatment for SUD and MI with an understanding of how treatment works and can save lives. Diverting individuals who need treatment should be a priority at every inflection point in the legal system including for judges and clerk magistrates. Up to 70% or more of the incarcerated population includes those struggling with diseases that can and must be successfully treated. ([source](#), [source](#))
- The need for practical supports for those living in poverty or at risk for poverty. Like treatment for illnesses described above, we must find ways to constructively connect individuals in need to the supports that can help them; this should hold our focus more than prosecuting their mistakes whenever possible. We must correct for the ways that those with fewer financial resources experience greater negative impacts in the legal system. And we need to proactively confront the fact that individuals experiencing poverty or financial struggles are often directly disadvantaged by established policies and policing, see Ferguson, MI as just one example that helped develop our understanding following the death of Michael Brown at the hands of the police in 2014. ([source](#))
- Cash bail is a system that has outlived its usefulness and now simply serves to disadvantage those with fewer financial resources than others. Addressing that successfully would substantially improve (by decreasing) the numbers of individuals incarcerated every day. In MA 62% of the jail population is being held pretrial ([source](#)); eliminating cash bail would make an immediate and positive impact. Statutorily bail is only supposed to ensure an individual returns to court to answer their charges; it is not intended to be a mechanism for pretrial punishment yet so many people, often people of color and those with fewer financial resources are held every day because they cannot afford to pay the bail and secure their freedom pretrial.

5. What role can the Governor's Council play in helping to end mass incarceration in Massachusetts?

By elevating the issues – the detrimental impacts of systemic racism, stigma, lack of treatment for SUD and MI, economic drivers, and others that have led to the meteoric rise in incarceration rates nationwide and including in MA, the Governor's Council can advocate for change at the judicial, clerk magistrate, and parole board levels. Judges, clerk magistrates, and parole board members have enormous power that impacts people's lives every day. Our screening process must account for that impact and create opportunities for change to decrease the numbers of those incarcerated, increase diversion and treatment options, and empower judges and others to leverage restorative justice practices.

We can support the prison building moratorium and advocate for closures at existing facilities, so they can be repurposed for constructive use – perhaps in the SUD treatment ecosystem of care including supportive housing.

We can also elevate the fiscal realities into the conversations we have, every dollar spent incarcerating or confining individuals could be spent educating, housing, or providing real supports to potentiate success rather than disadvantage individuals, their families, and their communities. According to MA Department of Corrections (DOC) data reported for 2021 ([source](#)) it costs between \$67,301 per incarcerated individual per year up to \$436,157 per incarcerated individual per year. Repurposing that money to help people would be an exciting change to see.

Governor Healey and the Governor's Council took an exciting step in the last few weeks to provide a blanket pardon for all misdemeanor cannabis offenses. This is a great first step but so much more needs to be done, and I am very hopeful to be a constructive voice in pressing for even greater advances.

6. Governor Maura Healey released a [new set of guidelines](#) for the use of the Governor's clemency power late last year. What are your thoughts on the new guidelines, and how do you approach the work of pardons and commutations?

I am so heartened by these new guidelines and that the Governor has been actively implementing her thoughtful approach that centers on equity, accountability, fairness, and social responsibility to begin to address the inequities in the system. I welcome the early successes she has had in collaborating with the Governor's Council and look forward to supporting greater progress in the years to come.

To fully address the unfairness and inequities in the system, we will need to build on the groundwork the Governor has established, and I look forward to sharpening the equity focus established in the new guidelines and ensuring

the voices of those most deeply impacted by injustices in the legal system are embedded in the practices including for those on the Governor's Council.

I am especially heartened by the focus on youth and understanding human development in the design of our justice practices or improvements like in the Governor's new guidelines. It is my hope that we will use a data driven approach, set goals and benchmarks, and measure for improvement over time. We will want to know demographic information for those that are considered and approved for clemency, the types of charges that are considered with our work, and as always where we will need to adjust and improve to ensure our practice and our decisions are equitable. In health care, we fundamentally know we are unlikely to truly improve outcomes we do not measure and report with transparency. We need to establish assertive goals, measure our successes and failures considering those goals, report to the community in a transparent manner, and establish both a progressive mindset and durable processes for continuous improvement.

7. As a (current or future) member of the Governor's Council, what do you perceive your role to be in considering a judicial nominee's potential to reduce or eliminate rights of civil litigants?

I will strive to center on issues of equity and progressive values when considering all aspects of a judicial nominee's scope of practice hoping never to limit the rights of any individual or litigant. As a social worker that has worked in homelessness services and in health care, I have seen the ways that civil litigation too can disadvantage individuals – housing law, employment law, family law, and more are all powerful influencers. I will at all times strive to center equity, accountability, and fairness in the screening and vetting process of appointees as well as include the voices of those with lived experience in the conversations to drive improvements for the future. As best practices emerge, I will do my best to include them in the work I do if elected to the Governor's Council.

I have firsthand experience with the family courts innovating and supporting my desire as a young girl navigating a chaotic family situation. While the experience was difficult, I was the first (I am told but have never researched to confirm) adolescent female to have their father be awarded custody in Massachusetts when I was 13 years old and wanted to live with my dad and not my mom following their divorce. It matters that we learn, grow, and consider openly change to established patterns that may not be equitable - in this case to fathers in custody proceedings. This type of change is important to consider in many circumstances and was a life changer for me.

8. The Massachusetts constitution clearly establishes a “right to a clean environment.” What does that right mean to you?

That “right” means responsibility to me to work for better outcomes for future generations and also for communities today that suffer environmental

hazards and consequences from past decisions and lack of progress. I will do my research and make my arguments or advocate for solutions that are science based and equity focused. Often the “business” case is used to argue against advancements especially if they cost money to make, but too often that keeps us from having the complete conversation that balances our need and desire to responsibly support businesses but also advance environmental safety and protections. Ultimately it is our collective responsibility to proactively confront and address climate change as a global threat.

9. To what extent do you intend to participate in the *recruitment of demographically and professionally diverse candidates to apply for positions on the various boards under the Governor’s Council’s purview?*

I would be enthusiastic about and feel very privileged to help recruit and appoint demographically and professionally diverse candidates. As someone who works to advance equity professionally and who does not have professional ties to others serving in the legal system, I feel I will be more able to advance this work objectively and without constraint. I believe diversity is fundamentally necessary to improve processes and outcomes and will work hard to find ways to positively impact the recruitment and appointment of diverse candidates.

10. Many people are unaware of the existence of the Governor’s Council. How will you seek to increase transparency and civic engagement if elected?

I so appreciate this question. Currently I am running for an open seat and have 3 Democratic opponents and have said many times that this is great for District 2 because we can hopefully bring some welcome exposure to the important work of the Council while we are campaigning no matter who wins the Primary.

Transparency is vital, and ensuring we collect and report data with outcomes will be crucial to elevating transparency for the Council. We need to set progressive goals and measure for success then honestly report results and evaluate how to improve.

To build engagement we must invite it. We will need to intentionally invite feedback, criticism, and investment from different stakeholder groups like our constituents, those that have firsthand experience with the detrimental impacts of over incarceration, participants at all levels of the legal system from the police to judges and corrections staff, social justice advocacy groups, community leaders, and experts across the field of judicial reform to name just some. We need to do our best to invite a robust and complete conversation around our practices with an open mindset to pursue improvement and use equity as our fundamental guiding principle.

11. (If a challenger or a candidate for an open seat) How would you describe yourself as similar to or different from the current officeholder?

I am a candidate for an open seat and my experience as a social worker that centers on equity professionally and personally sets me apart. I have worked with people whose lives have been shattered by their experiences with the legal system and will work to elevate their voices. I have professional experience in system design, primarily in SUD treatment system design, using stakeholder engagement and founded on the principle that we include everyone impacted by the system in those critical conversations. I will run a grassroots campaign building support across the District focusing on learning from the residents in the District what their priorities are, asking for many small donations, and working to share my message that we can build a better legal system that is equitable, fair, and constructive if we work together. I truly believe in a better system and am committed to working hard to make that possible.

B. Yes/No Questions

1. **Reproductive Justice - I.** Young people under sixteen seeking an abortion must obtain parental consent or judicial authorization. While most young people involve their parents, many cannot, causing delays to timely medical care and counseling. Scared teens may also turn to dangerous measures: going out of state or risking their lives and health with illegal or self-induced abortion. Would you support repealing this restriction on young people's access to abortion? (Y/N) **YES.**
2. **Reproductive Justice -- II.** With the overturning of Roe v. Wade, states are more important than ever as bulwarks of reproductive rights. Would you commit to voting against any judicial nominees with anti-abortion records? (Y/N) **YES.**
3. **Police Accountability.** The 2020 police accountability legislation 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?
 - a. 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) **YES.**
 - b. 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) **YES.**
4. **Sentencing Reform.** The 2018 criminal justice reform bill was an important first step in reducing mass incarceration. However, in our "liberal" state, incarceration rates remain much higher than they are in other countries, and sentencing laws can be even more punitive than those in states viewed as conservative. Do you support the following reforms?
 - a. Eliminating mandatory minimums for all drug offenses? (Y/N) **YES.**
 - b. 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 and more likely to successfully transition to adulthood? (Y/N) **YES.**
 - c. Decriminalizing consensual sexual activity between adolescents, by creating

an exception to the statutory rape law for youth [close in age](#)? (Y/N) **YES.**

- d. Eliminating the sentence of life without parole, which is costly and has been shown to be racist in its application? (Y/N) **YES.**
5. **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 teenagers. Would you support...
 - a. 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) **YES.**
 - b. Requiring the immediate sealing of a criminal offense if the charge did not end in a conviction? (Y/N) **YES.**
6. **Solitary Confinement.** Although the 2018 Criminal Justice Reform Act contained provisions to reduce the excessive and harmful use of solitary confinement, the Department of Corrections has established policies and practices to [evade implementation of the spirit of these reforms](#), by essentially turning Souza-Baranowski into de facto solitary confinement by limiting out of cell time to three hours per day, which exceeds the definition established in the 2018 Act by one hour. Would you support legislation to address this discrepancy by establishing 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) **YES.**
7. **Prison Moratorium.** Would you support a moratorium on the construction of new prisons and jails in the Commonwealth? (Y/N) **YES.**
8. **Prison Accountability.** Governor's Councilors have the statutory right to make unannounced visits to correctional facilities run by the state. Would you commit to exercising this right in order to improve accountability for the Department of Corrections? (Y/N) **YES.**