



**Chris Dempsey for State Auditor
2022 Massachusetts Nurses PAC
Questionnaire Responses**

Submitted: April 21st, 2022

1. Please describe your top three priorities for the Auditor's office and why you decided to run for office.

My campaign is driven by the desire to make state government work better for the residents, taxpayers, and workers of the Commonwealth. As the son of public-school teachers who dug into their own pockets to pay for school supplies for their students, I have seen first-hand how we underfund critical needs like public education and public health. I have also seen that when decisions in state government are made with a lack of public accountability and transparency that they often benefit special interests -- especially corporate interests -- at the expense of the common good. As State Auditor, I will make the Commonwealth a more fair and equitable place to be born, raise a family, work, and grow old, by making our state government more effective, more accountable, and more responsive to its people.

Massachusetts residents face a number of pressing challenges, from the high cost of housing, to a broken transportation system, to health care that is neither cost effective nor accessible, to an education system that produces vastly different outcomes for students depending on their zip code. The State Auditor's Office can help improve all of these areas of public policy and more. Our campaign was the first in this race to [issue policy plans](#) for how we wanted to use the office as a platform to improve state government. Our first three policy papers addressed these three topics: (1) [Federal Stimulus Funding](#), (2) [Climate and Environmental Justice](#), and (3) [Reform of the Massachusetts State Police](#).

2. In 2019, the Auditor's Office conducted an audit on the Department of Public Health (DPH) that found the DPH routinely falling short with regards to on-site survey investigations and complaint intakes. In our experience this continues to be a problem-particularly when it comes to patient safety and quality patient care at healthcare facilities. Do you intend to conduct a follow up to this Audit during your tenure in office?

Yes. As auditor I will use audits to uncover government malpractice wherever it exists. Auditor Bump's initial audit in 2019 uncovered serious shortcomings on behalf of DPH, and I will conduct a follow up audit to ensure the situation has been improved.

Furthermore, I plan to make audits like this one more accessible to the public. The findings and reports of the Auditor's office must be made more visible and more effective at communicating the need for change within the state government. Under my leadership, the Auditor's Office will establish an Action Tracker modeled on the Action Tracker produced by the GAO, the Federal auditor's office. This will help the public, advocates, and the media to check in on the progress of implementing the office's recommendations over time.

- 3. The state's Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has increasingly shifted finances to privately operated group homes and increased funding for these private vendors by approximately 64% since 2012. At this time, the spending on these private vendors makes up the vast majority of the total spending. What oversight role do you see for the Auditor's office in ensuring this funding is being appropriately utilized and that residents have access to safe appropriate services that are equivalent to state operated homes?**

The Auditor plays a central role in defending taxpayers against initiatives that deliver profits to private companies at the expense of unionized workers. It is important that we have clear goals for these private vendors and metrics to measure our progress against these goals. I will look closely at the Department of Developmental Services programs to ensure the agency's spending is achieving the goals we have for it as a Commonwealth.

- 4. Hospitals in Massachusetts regularly receive millions of dollars in public funding from the state. Sometimes this money is supposed to be allocated for a specific purpose and sometimes it is not. What is the role of the Auditor's office in tracking these dollars and making the public aware of how this money is spent?**

The State Auditor is responsible for tracking every dollar of state spending. The Auditor must be especially vigilant on programs that provide state resources to private and/or non-profit institutions, which may have less oversight than state agencies. The Office of the State Auditor can shine a light on the existence of these subsidies and ask tough questions about how the recipients of these funds are using public dollars to advance the public good.

5. How would you use the powers of the Auditors Office to ensure that Massachusetts patients are receiving the healthcare they deserve?

Our healthcare system is too complex, too expensive, and far too inequitable. There's a lot we need to change to provide better, more cost-effective care, and to look out for the needs of all stakeholders in the system: patients, providers, healthcare workers, taxpayers, employers, and others. The focus of the Office of State Auditor is on public expenditures, and the largest slice of the state's budget is the Mass Health program. We must ensure that Mass Health is providing comprehensive and rigorous coverage and that provider fraud is minimized so that the resources available for Mass Health benefit patients. As Auditor, my focus will be on ensuring Mass Health is the best program that it can be for those who rely on it, including roughly 40% of all children and 60% of all people with disabilities in Massachusetts. Beyond that focus, as Auditor I will use the platform of the office to advance conversations on health equity and on needed reforms to the private portions of our healthcare system. We need further reform of our healthcare system that ensures that healthcare workers are treated and paid fairly, that patients receive care that is appropriately staffed, that costs are reasonable, and that everyone in the Commonwealth has access to high-quality care.

6. What is the role of the Auditor in providing transparency in the healthcare space with regards to healthcare facilities? Health insurance carriers?

The Auditor's office plays a crucial role in making health insurance more efficient and streamlined, reducing red tape, and ensuring that providers to Mass Health are providing the best possible services to recipients. Our health system is complicated and an important driver of the Massachusetts economy. As we seek to cover 100% residents, either through single-payer or a hybrid system, we should do so in ways that support jobs and innovation in our bio-tech and health care sectors. I believe that my role as Auditor would be to provide strict oversight of Mass Health, healthcare facilities, and other providers that residents rely on for services across the state. The importance of the healthcare industry demands anyone in the Auditor position pay close attention to all aspects of our healthcare ecosystem. Transparency is sorely needed; the devastating events at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home during the pandemic proved that, and it will be a priority of mine to audit facilities where concerns are raised.

7. We have seen the closures of hospitals, mental health units, substance use disorder units and the elimination of maternal health and pediatric services across the state, leaving large regions of the state without access to essential health services. Do you see a role for the Auditors Office in examining these closures and their effect on the health of communities?

Yes. We have significant regional inequities in healthcare in Massachusetts. I will be an Auditor for everyone in the Commonwealth, and that means paying particular attention to regions of the state that are often forgotten or left out when policy decisions are made on Beacon Hill.

8. Under the Massachusetts Taxpayers Protection Act, the Auditor is responsible for reviewing proposals from state agencies and state authorities seeking to privatize services currently performed by public employees. Per this law, the agency or authority must demonstrate and certify that privatization will both save money and maintain the same level of quality of service provided by state employees and that the private contractor has a record of complying with state law and regulations and will meet minimum statutory requirements regarding wages and employee benefits. We have seen examples where the Auditor's office has permitted privatization despite these factors not being present. Please describe how your office would approach this.

Elected officials at all levels of government must work to protect workers and vulnerable residents. As State Auditor, I will pay particular attention to areas of state government where workers may be mismanaged and mistreated, and where services are not being provided properly for residents who need them.

Under the Massachusetts Taxpayer Protection Act (often referred to as the Pacheco Law), the Office of the State Auditor is responsible for reviewing proposals from state agencies and various state authorities that seek to privatize a service that is currently performed by public employees. In this capacity, the Auditor plays a central role in defending taxpayers against initiatives that deliver profits to private companies, often at the expense of unionized workers. As Auditor, I will bring a keen eye to these decisions, with an understanding that the law intends and requires the Auditor to reject any proposal that does not clear a high bar on both cost and quality. I will take this responsibility seriously and commit to rejecting any proposal that does not meet this bar.

Nurses and other healthcare workers need someone in the Auditor's Office that shows up every day to ensure state government is working fairly and effectively for residents, taxpayers, and workers. I bring a proven track record of creating change and standing up to protect the public interest, and will continue to do so as the next State Auditor.

9. What other endorsements have you received?

I have been honored to receive the endorsement of more than 100 local elected officials, state legislators from Pittsfield to Provincetown, progressive organizations like Progressive Massachusetts and Progressive Democrats of Massachusetts, and labor unions representing blue-collar and white-collar workers in both the public and private sectors. We have not yet made all of these endorsements public, but would be glad to share in follow-up conversations further details of these endorsements for consideration by MNA.

Additional comments:

I have the education, the experience, and the toughness to be the next Chief Accountability Officer for the taxpayers and residents of Massachusetts. I am a proven advocate and watchdog for the public interest, and am the only candidate in this race with experience working in the executive branch of state government, which is the focus of the State Auditor's Office. I am ready and excited for the challenge of the Auditor's Office and would be grateful for the endorsement of the Massachusetts Nurses PAC.