



**Chris Dempsey for State Auditor
Massachusetts Society of CPAs
Questionnaire Responses**

Submitted: February 28th, 2022

Q&A with Candidates for Massachusetts State Auditor

1. Tell us about yourself and your professional background. What do you see as the responsibility of the State Auditor's Office? How does your professional experience translate to the duties of state auditor and the office you would oversee?

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. In addition to my experience in the public and non-profit sectors, I have worked in the private sector in management consulting and hold an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School.

The State Auditor is one of only six state officials that is accountable directly to voters. The Auditor oversees a team of about 200 analysts and auditors who dig into every corner of the executive branch of state government. The office conducts audits, investigations, and studies to promote accountability and transparency, improve performance, and make government work better.

As the Chief Accountability Officer for state government in Massachusetts, the Auditor must be someone who is independent, who has experience working in state government, and who has stood up to powerful special interests to protect taxpayers and the public interest. The Auditor must be the public face of accountability and good government for all of the Commonwealth.

I served as Assistant Secretary of Transportation for Governor Deval Patrick, where I co-founded the MassDOT open-data program, which launched smartphone applications that tell you when your bus or train is going to arrive, saving taxpayers and farepayers millions compared with more costly and cumbersome alternatives. We made the MBTA the first transit agency on the entire East Coast to make those apps available to riders and received national attention in the [Wall Street Journal](#) and on [NPR](#) by making the MBTA a leader on real-time information.

More recently, I served as the Director of the [Transportation for Massachusetts coalition](#), which advocates for better transportation policy statewide. While Massachusetts compares well to other states on issues like education and health care, we have fallen far behind on transportation, where we typically rank in the bottom ten states. We need more leaders on Beacon Hill with the experience and expertise to fix our transportation problems, which are intertwined with our challenges in housing, the environment, and in other key areas of public policy.

But beyond my professional track record working to improve the Commonwealth, I have also stood up to protect the public interest with volunteerism and civic engagement. I led the grassroots campaign [No Boston Olympics](#), which was successful despite being outspent 1,500-1 by some of the most powerful special interests in the state. The Boston 2024 Olympic bid required that taxpayers

promise to cover 100% of Olympic cost overruns, threatening the fiscal future of our Commonwealth and putting taxpayers on the hook for a private endeavor. This grassroots leadership earned me Boston Globe Magazine's "[Bostonian of the Year](#)" award in 2015.

I also have experience working in and with municipal government, as an elected Town Meeting Member in Brookline since 2012, and as Chair of the Transportation Board. I understand the needs and budgetary constraints faced by Massachusetts cities and towns, and have managed hundreds -- if not thousands -- of hours of public meetings keeping the wheels of local government turning while ensuring that all voices are heard.

In the private sector, I have worked with some of the country's largest companies to help the economy grow as a consultant at Bain & Co., and also led business development for a software technology startup that created jobs in Massachusetts and provided improved and innovative delivery of public services to residents in Massachusetts, New York, California, and elsewhere.

I am a graduate of the Brookline Public Schools, Pomona College (B.A.), and Harvard Business School (M.B.A.). I have taught at the graduate level at the Northeastern University School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs. I live with my fiancée, Anna, on the first floor of a triple-decker in Brookline Village, a few blocks from where I grew up and where my parents still live. Anna and I are looking forward to starting a family together, and we want that to be in a Massachusetts that is the best that it can be; that means making Massachusetts state government the best that it can be.

2. In your previous experience, have you performed or led a team to uncover any fraud, waste or abuse, and if so, what were the results? What was the scope of savings because of the investigation?

My leadership of the No Boston Olympics effort saved taxpayers billions of dollars in Olympic cost overruns. Our grassroots campaign drew significant public attention to the possibilities of extreme waste associated and perverse incentives associated with a bid for the Olympics. The Boston 2024 proposal, pushed by powerful, connected special interests and supported by many of the Commonwealth's most influential elected officials, would have required all of us as state taxpayers to cover all Olympic cost overruns. The risks and costs associated with Olympic bids are well-documented, but it is easy for a community to get caught up in Olympic gold fever, especially when the boosters of the games show off glossy images of gleaming Olympic venues, and then offer promises, however hollow, about how these venues will be built without public dollars. Early polling showed that the public supported the Olympic bid. But as No Boston Olympics worked to uncover and share more data with the public, the tide turned.

We were outspent on this campaign 1,500 to 1, but we had the facts on our side and we built a grassroots effort that made the case to the public. We ensured the media and public were aware of important details buried in agreements that were left unaddressed at celebratory press conferences held by Olympic boosters. These agreements included unrealistic estimates of construction (and demolition) costs, mischaracterizations of our public-transportation system, and requirements for Olympic officials to restrict public access on certain highways for the duration of the Games. Our concerns about cost overruns were ratified by the The Brattle Group, an internationally regarded economic consulting firm hired by Governor Baker to appraise the costs and ramifications of the Games.

I have also worked within state government to save taxpayers money. I am a transit rider, and I will be the first statewide elected official since Governor Dukakis to commute to Beacon Hill on the T. I know what it's like to be waiting in the rain for a train or bus. As Assistant Secretary of Transportation for Governor Deval Patrick, I was shocked when I walked into a room at the MBTA Operations Center and learned that the agency had access to the real-time locations of MBTA buses. Yet management didn't see fit to make that information public to frustrated commuters like me.

Rather than just call on others to make change, I decided to do something about it myself. I co-founded the program at MassDOT that released that data to the public via real-time apps available to riders. This made the MBTA -- not an agency known for innovation -- the very first transit agency on the East Coast to do so, and set a tone for transit agencies nationwide that these data should be open and transparent to all. My approach saved taxpayers and farepayers millions relative to more costly alternatives that elusively always remained five-or-more years away. As State Auditor I will bring this same brand of transformational change and transparency to every corner of state government.

Both within government and as a private citizen, I have succeeded at leading teams that have improved our Commonwealth. This has meant digging into and understanding the details of public policy, because the details matter in our finances and the services we deliver.

3. As a candidate for state auditor, what do you see as the top challenge(s) facing Massachusetts? What role does the state auditor play in helping to resolve those challenges?

Our campaign has released three policy papers that provide a perspective on the breadth of my priorities as State Auditor and the role that the Auditor can play in meaningfully advancing the Commonwealth to make it more efficient, more effective, and more fair. These are:

1. Oversight of federal stimulus funding: <https://dempseyforauditor.com/arpa/>
2. Climate and environmental justice: <https://dempseyforauditor.com/climate/>
3. Reform and accountability of the Massachusetts State Police: <https://dempseyforauditor.com/msp/>

These papers describe an approach to public accountability and reform that is both creative and pragmatic. We need to apply this kind of problem-solving to every challenge facing the Commonwealth, including housing, transportation, healthcare, and education. Many of these challenges overlap and contribute to barriers of affordability and access for too many Massachusetts residents. The next State Auditor should be someone who hasn't just called for change, but has actually led change within state government and solved tangible, real problems facing people across the Commonwealth.

4. Members of MassCPAs' Governmental Accounting and Auditing Committee work closely with Massachusetts municipalities that have received millions of dollars in additional federal funding from the federal government over the last few years. As this level of federal funding is historically unprecedented, how would your office partner with MassCPAs Governmental Accounting and Auditing Committee, municipal auditors and municipalities to ensure that compliance with all required guidelines is maintained? What are your plans to deploy adequate resources to municipalities to combat any potential waste and fraud?

I am the only candidate in this race with experience at the municipal level, where I have served as an elected Town Meeting Member since 2012, have served on committees on zoning and regulation of short-term rentals (such as AirBNBs), and served for many years as the Chair of the Brookline Transportation Board. I understand the needs of our communities first-hand, and appreciate the opportunity that federal stimulus funding provides. As of late February, nine months into this race, we are the only campaign to release a specific plan for oversight of federal stimulus dollars.

That more than \$5 billion will be allocated and spent by the state government -- and additional billions by municipalities and other public entities -- between now and 2026 presents a monumental opportunity, but it also comes with significant risks. Without oversight, this unique chance to invest in the people of Massachusetts and strengthen our economy could be squandered on inefficient programs, slow bureaucratic processes, and fraud and abuse. But if these discretionary and state/local agency dollars are spent well, they can transform our communities, reduce inequities in health and education, improve our environment, and leave a lasting legacy for future generations. Our Commonwealth and its residents need clear and accessible information about how the money is being spent. This includes ensuring that state and federal rules have been followed and that government entities and residents alike understand how well these funds have met our goals. The Governor's Federal Funds Office has begun the first step by providing initial transparency into how funds have been spent so far, but there is far more oversight needed. I will regularly meet with the MassCPAs Governmental Accounting and Auditing Committee and partner with the committee to ensure its perspective is heard on Beacon Hill.

The State Auditor is directly elected by the voters and is independent from both the legislature and the governor. It is the right office within the state government to take responsibility for making certain that federal funds are spent clearly and appropriately and that those responsible for tracking and safeguarding funds at a local level have a seat at the table on Beacon Hill.

Recovery funds come with specific reporting requirements to ensure these resources are used for appropriate purposes and documented properly. These rules aren't merely a matter of completing paperwork. Funds misused (or misdocumented) are subject to repayment to the Federal government -- meaning that failure to adhere to these requirements presents a real risk to our state and local budgets. Returning these dollars to the federal government would be a monumental breach of the public trust and a failure of responsible stewardship of public resources. The State Auditor's Office can prevent that from happening, especially when it works in partnership with municipal auditors and municipalities and the experts who make up the MassCPAs Governmental Accounting and Auditing Committee.

The Governor's Federal Funds Office has laid the groundwork to provide compliance information to state agencies, as well as to local governments receiving unprecedented quantities of Federal aid. As Auditor, I will review the practices and performance of the Federal Funds Office to ensure compliance with federal and state rules and prevent Massachusetts from needing to return a single dollar to Washington, D.C.

Auditor Suzanne Bump and Inspector General Glenn Cunha recently testified before the State Legislature in support of the creation of a reserve fund to be used by the State Auditor's Office, the Office of the Inspector General, the Attorney General, and the State Comptroller for pandemic relief oversight. A similar fund was available in response to the stimulus spending process during the Great Recession, and Massachusetts received national recognition for its oversight of those funds.

These federal funds are a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make our Commonwealth stronger than it was before the pandemic; but that will only happen if we ensure these dollars are spent well. That includes addressing systemic problems in our society that COVID-19 brought into stark relief. As State Auditor, I will track and monitor this spending, make sure it reaches every community in the Commonwealth, and ensure that it leaves our Commonwealth stronger and more resilient.

5. When the current state auditor took office in 2011, she was very successful in undertaking sweeping reform by removing individuals who lacked the skills and qualifications to effectively perform their duties and replaced them with individuals who did possess the skills, qualifications and experience to perform these job functions. While this level of effort has been sustained, the current risk facing all employers is the lack of skilled workers who will be available to replace the aging workforce. Given the technical skills necessary to properly fulfill the duties of these positions, what is the plan to take on this significant challenge?

Auditor Bump's "sweeping reforms" have put the office in a strong position. Increased attention to culture and internal oversight have improved the outputs of the office and professionalized its approach to reform of state government. I look forward to working with the staff she has recruited and trained. As the question notes, however, members of the staff will retire and change jobs, and I plan to further build a dynamic and skilled team.

The strength of the Massachusetts economy and people are advantages for the Auditor's office as we renew the workforce in the coming years. The growing importance of auditing and evaluation within the public and social sectors has led to more relevant coursework at colleges and universities as well as people picking up these skills mid-career. Building awareness and excitement around the role of Auditor will only help to recruit additional candidates.

As Auditor, I will strengthen our relationship with postsecondary and graduate institutions to build a pipeline of recent graduates for entry and second-level positions. I will also work with to introduce, where possible, hiring flexibilities including:

- Permanent, part-time staff to encourage people with child care, medical, or other personal responsibilities to be able to serve the Commonwealth,
- Succession planning and phase-down of commitments for those near the end of their career who may wish to remain part-time or on a consultative basis,
- Entry paths for people looking at mid-career shifts to work with the State and/or to make auditing and evaluation full-time pursuits,
- Investigating a program to bring in new skills and practices by engaging employees from other public and private organizations to serve in the Auditor's Office in full-time, part-time, or temporary capacities. This program could also give opportunities for non-traditional employees to try working for the Auditor's office without a long-term commitment.

6. The current State Auditor's Office developed sophisticated analytics capabilities, which helped identify deficiencies in various state programs. What experience do you have that would enable you to follow through on those initiatives and progress in an ever-changing technological environment? What additional types of technological advancements do you foresee undertaking?

I have been on both sides of the table for complex public-sector procurements of technology. As Assistant Secretary of Transportation, I led a procurement process for the overhaul of the state's 511 traffic information system. As the North American Business Development Director for Masabi, I led successful transitions and roll-outs for public sector agencies looking to adopt world-leading technology to improve customer service. As a management consultant at Bain & Co., I worked with large datasets and developed sophisticated analytical tools to help a telecommunications company plan its rollout of fiber-optic infrastructure. This model had informed multi-billion-dollar investment decisions.

As in the previous question, this is an area where we are fortunate that the needs of the Auditor's office match those of Massachusetts employers broadly. Analytical, data collection, and data management skills are increasingly important across society and are taught in our schools, colleges, and universities. Our local tech sector is truly an asset in this area as we have residents who are both building and using the tools our own Office also needs. Useful, mutual exchange with these organizations (taking advantage of the flexibilities identified above) can help my office have access to the necessary people, skills, and tools. It will also help the companies building these tools keep the needs of public agencies in mind as they develop and improve new products. Ultimately, we need more of this expertise in-house in state government, and that means fostering a culture of results-oriented public service that serves taxpayers and provides employees with a meaningful opportunity to make change in Massachusetts state government.

Looking at the areas for advancement, the best machine learning algorithms or most esoteric regression models are insufficient when data are poorly documented, inconsistently recorded, or spread across disparate incompatible data sources. Broadly, audits, evaluations, and functional everyday service rely on connected, documented, accessible, and secure databases. Unfortunately, across governments worldwide, data are not always able to guarantee they are all of the above.

Improvements and modernization in data collection and storage across the Commonwealth would not only result in improved quality and utility of audits from my office, but also enable state agencies to improve their own service delivery. In publishing open and transparent data, our State agencies will support the needs of the research community, advocacy groups, and residents in Massachusetts who deserve access to information.

7. How do you plan to be involved in the auditing and accounting/financial community? Are you willing to present at MassCPAs' Government Accounting and Auditing Conference? Will you designate a staff member to attend monthly MassCPAs Governmental Accounting and Auditing Committee meetings?

I look forward to meeting with MassCPA members and would be grateful for the opportunity to present at the MassCPA conference. I hope that this will be an annual opportunity. I commit to designating a staff member to attend monthly MassCPAs Governmental Accounting and Auditing Committee meetings, and I think those meetings will provide value to our office and to taxpayers. I hope they also help inform the Committee and the broader accounting/financial community about the important work our office is doing.

In addition to events and regular meetings, I want my office, my staff, and work that we do to be a resource to support government accountants and auditors day-to-day. As noted above, initiatives that bring people into the world of government auditing and evaluation, improvements to data collection and storage, and the sharing of other best practices are important ways my office will be supporting everyone in the accounting and financial community daily. Beyond those broad items, the Auditor's Office must maintain and strengthen its role as a resource for all, responding to queries from municipalities and those in the field. I will be a strong partner to the accounting/financial community.