



Dear neighbor,

My name is Anna Callahan. I am a software engineer and mom running for State Representative here in Medford and Somerville in the Democratic primary on September 1st. There is a lot at stake in this election, especially in these challenging times, and I am writing this letter to explain why I am running and to ask for your vote. I hope that I'll also reach you by phone or at your door (from a safe distance), but if you have any questions please don't hesitate to reach out to me at 617-237-6333, email at anna@annacallahan.com, follow me on Twitter [@AnnaCallahan4MA](https://twitter.com/AnnaCallahan4MA) or visit annacallahan.com for more information.

I am running for state rep because I know that with a different kind of progressive leadership in the State House, we can pass critical legislation that is currently blocked by house leadership despite broad support from constituents. We have a veto-proof supermajority of Democrats in the State House, and yet we can't pass common-sense legislation such as 100% renewables by 2050, the Safe Communities Act, true universal healthcare coverage, and election-day registration. What has gone wrong?

Unfortunately, the Massachusetts State House has a long history of corruption (the past three Speakers of the House were convicted of felonies¹). The Speaker determines which bills will move forward and which will die quietly in committee. I know that the people of Massachusetts—and certainly people in our district—are not satisfied by Speaker DeLeo's stranglehold on these legislative priorities. We deserve a state rep who will work to fix this broken system, and not align herself with the Speaker.

I am challenging our incumbent State Rep Christine Barber because she has supported the Speaker's power and voted to uphold the undemocratic system that prevents us from passing progressive policy.

I moved to Somerville in 2003 and love it here. I met my husband here, our son was born here, and he loves to play with his cousins who live a mile away. I am proud to be part of an active, engaged community where so many of us are committed to environmental, racial, social, and economic justice.

As part of my commitment to these values, four years ago I started working full time on long-term fixes for our democracy, building progressive electoral strength from the ground up, and helping to engage more people in progressive activism. That's the same commitment I will bring to the State House—a dedication to engaging people in our district and a dedication to solving the root problems at the State House that prevent Massachusetts from passing progressive policy.

My personal story

My dad is from a small town in Kansas, and my mom is from a low-income family in Britain. My parents divorced while I was in junior high, and my mother, sister and I moved to North Shore Chicago.

¹ https://www.masslive.com/news/2011/07/a_tale_of_3_speakers_-_salvat.html

I was the only kid in the high school of about 2000 to receive government-subsidized lunches. My mother valued education, and she sacrificed so my sister and I could go to a good public school.

I got a BS in Mathematics from the University of Michigan. After college, I pursued my life-long dream: to be a jazz trumpet player. I moved to Los Angeles and joined Musician's Union Local 47. I played gigs, taught lessons, toured, and produced two albums. I did whatever I could to pay the bills. I remember my hands shaking over finances, not knowing if I would be able to make ends meet.

I became politically active in my twenties. I moved into a housing cooperative where I learned to be a zero-waster, eat vegetarian, and run a compost. We avoided purchasing items from companies that used sweatshop labor, damaged the environment, were anti-union, or used animal testing or prison labor. This was my awakening to how our own individual actions affect the most vulnerable, near and far.

In 2000 I was arrested while on a peaceful, police-escorted protest. I spent two nights in jail. It was painfully clear to me then how much worse that experience would have been if I hadn't been white. It forever shaped my view of policing and incarceration.

While living in LA I was elected president of the board of a multimillion dollar nonprofit housing association. The association was being run into the ground by an entrenched group of paid staffers, and I got elected because I wanted to change that. I was lucky to work with others dedicated to changing the fundamental problems. For two years the opposition invented crises to distract us, sent their cronies to yell at us during board meetings, and every few months we had to run election campaigns for board members on our side. After two years we fired the worst offenders, and after that things got fixed, replaced, and repainted, and revenue increased by 37% within a year.

I've seen firsthand how we can accomplish fundamental change under immense pressure, and I am proud of the work we did together. State reps in Massachusetts are pressured to fall in line with the Speaker's agenda, but it is only by opposing that pressure that we will turn things around for our state.

In 2003 I moved to Somerville. I taught myself computer programming. I met my husband. We got married and had our son. In early 2016 we moved to Berkeley for my husband's work. Inspired by Bernie Sanders' platform, I quit my job to volunteer full-time for the campaign.

After the primaries, I continued my activism by coordinating dozens of volunteers in Berkeley to elect a slate of progressives to the city council and mayorship. I worked especially hard to pass public financing of elections. I was then appointed to the Open Government and Fair Campaign Practices Commissions where I worked with other commissioners to finalize the legislation and implement the new policy.

In 2017, I started an organization called The Incorruptibles², and through it I trained dozens of groups across the country (in states like OK, KS, PA, CA, and here in MA) to elect slates of progressives to their city council. I taught people to use a model that builds local power by creating coalitions of under-served communities and engaging people in the political process.

We returned to Somerville in 2018 and I got involved in local politics, working to push forward tenant protections and joining the Somerville Paraprofessionals in their fight for a living wage. I trained people in Cambridge and Medford in 2019, and both cities ran slates of progressives, winning city council and school board seats.

About a year ago, I started a podcast on state politics³. I interviewed progressive state reps and organizations to help expose the deep systemic problems in the State House. For us to get the progressive change at the State House that our district wants, we need two things from our legislators: we need them to build the movement on the ground, and we need them to stand up to the Speaker. We are not getting either from our current state rep.

What is at stake in this election?

There are certainly issue areas where Rep Barber and I agree. We both want to move Massachusetts to renewable energy. We both support the Student Opportunity Act, which provides more funding to schools that are under-resourced. We both support immigrants' rights, women's rights, and LGBTQ+ rights. We both support the home rule petitions that Medford and Somerville have sent to the State House including tenant protections and institutional master plans from Tufts.

However, we fundamentally disagree on how to get major progressive policies through the State House. We all have progressive values; we need progressive *action*. You cannot be a progressive and support this Speaker; the last 10 years of inaction on progressive priorities should make that clear to any observer.

The Massachusetts State House has been increasingly plagued with corruption for decades.^{4,5} The Speaker has the power to control what legislation will reach the house floor for a vote and what legislation will die in committee. Only the Speaker can assign committee chairmanships, and those come with significant bonuses above a state rep's base salary. The Speaker threatens committee chairs if they don't do what he wants⁶, and he can take their chairmanships away at any moment. We as voters don't even get to know how our state reps vote—they choose to keep their votes secret. As a result, our state reps are accountable to the Speaker rather than their own constituents.

2 <https://theincorruptibles.us>

3 <https://incorruptible-mass.buzzsprout.com/>

4 <https://incorruptible-mass.buzzsprout.com/606004/1835890-representative-jonathan-hecht-concentration-of-power-in-the-state-house>

5 <https://publicintegrity.org/politics/state-politics/state-integrity-investigation/massachusetts-gets-d-grade-in-2015-state-integrity-investigation/>

6 <https://commonwealthmagazine.org/politics/ex-rep-deleo-told-me-vote-for-transpo-bill-or-lose-chairmanship-2/>

The power of the Speaker is corrosive. A state rep cannot both represent the values of her constituents and the whims of the Speaker; the two are necessarily at odds.

Like far too many state reps, Rep Barber voted consistently to increase the power of the Speaker to squelch progressive voices and policy; then she received a committee leadership position and a pay raise. Specifically, she voted to eliminate term limits for the Speaker. She voted against making committee votes public. She voted against allowing state reps even 30 minutes to read an amendment before voting on it, against 24 hours before voting on a bill in committee, and against 72 hours before a vote of the full House. She voted to increase the amount of money the Speaker is paid, and to increase the financial incentives the Speaker can give to his chosen chairs and co-chairs. She voted against posting committee votes on the Clerk's websites. **In all public votes on transparency she has voted against it; in all public votes on the concentration of power in the hands of the Speaker she has voted to increase it.**⁷

Elected officials have a unique position, a unique ability to engage people in the political process. Once in office, elected officials are primarily contacted by lobbyists, consultants, other politicians, and wealthier constituents. Elected officials must take an active role in choosing whom they listen to. We must reach out into the community to meet more vulnerable constituents where they are rather than wait for them to come to us. I will reach out beyond those already involved to listen to those most affected and to engage them in the political process.

Thank you so much for reading this far—I know you really care about our community if you've gotten to the end! **I hope you will join me in a vision for our state, one where our government works for all of us.** When elected, I promise to prioritize a transparent, democratic government that allows us to have a say. The people of Massachusetts are ready to lead the country on issues like climate change, systemic racism, and healthcare. Please join me in creating this reality, not just by voting for me in the Democratic primary on September 1st, but by staying engaged after the election in these issues that matter so much to us all.

Sincerely,
Anna Callahan

⁷ <https://www.progressivemass.com/>