

## 2025 BMRB/Dorchester Reporter CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

### Section 1: BACKGROUND/PERSONAL

#### **1. What is your name, age, and neighborhood where you live?**

My name is Julia Mejia, I live in Dorchester, and I am 55 years young.

#### **2. What is your present occupation? Also, please note any past employment that may be relevant to your candidacy.**

I am a current Boston City Councilor At-Large. My background is in community organizing, including founding and directing Collaborative Parent Leadership Action Network, a non-profit dedicated to empowering parents to be educational advocates. I also worked at MTV as a national broadcaster for 10 years and covered the 2000 Presidential Election.

#### **3. Please detail your educational background and achievements.**

I was raised by a single mother who was previously undocumented, and was the first person in my family to graduate high school and college. As a longtime community organizer and former nonprofit director, I've dedicated my life to dismantling systems of oppression and amplifying voices too often sidelined by special interests.

My career in community organizing began with directing a city-wide HIV/ AIDS youth and development initiative called Protect Teen Health, designed to train and produce the next generation of youth peer-leaders.

After working with young people, I decided to move to New York City where I landed a job at MTV. In 2000, I was an on-air reporter for the channel covering the 2000 Presidential election and trying to amplify the issues impacting urban youth across the country. Lastly, right before being elected to the City Council in 2019, I started my own non-profit called the Collaborative Parent Leadership Action Network (CPLAN). The mission of the non-profit is to inform, inspire, & empower parents to advocate for a more equitable education for their children.

All of these experiences took me deep into the core of the issues we face as resilient, yet underrepresented people. They codified a belief in me that those experiencing the brunt of inequity must be the ones shaping the solutions, and that nothing about us, without us, is for us. That belief is what ultimately drove me to run for office, and continues to guide my work every single day on the Boston City Council.

#### **4. Please list some of your affiliations with non-profits, civic associations, and political groups.**

This is not a comprehensive list, but throughout the years I have partnered and engaged as advisors from:

- a. Social Justice Movements: [Black Lives Matter](#), [Right to the City Vote](#)
- b. Social Change Statewide-National: [Amplify Latinx](#), [BECMA](#), [DiasporaMass](#), [Dunk the Vote](#), [Mijente](#), [Progressive Mass](#) and its local chapters
- c. Social Change Grassroots Organizations: [City Life Vida Urbana](#), [SIM](#), [NUBE](#), [Chinese Progressives Association](#), [Voices of Liberation](#), [New England Community Project](#), [Bread for Boston](#)
- d. Personal / Transformational Development: [Chica Project](#), [Determined Divas](#), [iBlossom](#), [The Dominican Women's Development](#), [Teen Empowerment](#), [Mothers for Justice and Healing](#), [Louis Brown Peace Institute](#)
- e. Education Justice: [BEJA](#), [CPLAN](#), [MA Appleseed](#), [MA Advocate for Children](#)
- f. Workforce Development/Small Business/Entrepreneurs: [Boston Main Streets](#), [Good Jobs for Boston Coalition](#)
- g. Civil Liberties: [Lawyers for Civil Rights](#), [ACLU](#), [NAACP](#) Boston branch,
- h. Labor and Economic Vitality: [MA Jobs with Justice](#), 32BJ-SEIU, SEIU1199, SEIU 509, MA Nurse Health, BTU, St Stephens
- i. Civic & Neighborhood Engagement: Neighborhood Civic Association Groups, [Cape Verdean Association of Boston](#), [Black Boston COVID Coalition](#),
- j. LGBTQIA2S+ voices: Chastity Bowick, BAGLY, GLAAD

## **5. What in your experience to date will most help you to be an effective leader?**

Having to become the unofficial translator for my mother and community at the age of 9 meant that from a young age I have been unafraid to speak truth to power. I learned to listen deeply and advocate fiercely for those whose voices were often ignored. These experiences shaped my ability to hold decision-makers accountable and ensure that the needs of my community are not just heard but acted upon. I have always been deeply rooted in the community, and throughout my time on the Council I have stayed that way. Community organizing has informed our office's innovative co-governance approach to policymaking where we work alongside the people, not just for them. My ability to convene people and bring them into spaces where they are heard, seen, and respected enables our office to bring people together across their differences and accomplish incredible things.

## **6. What are the three accomplishments you're most proud of?**

As the first Afro-Latina on Boston City Council, my number one accomplishment is shifting the narrative of what leadership looks like by showing that it does not require coming from privilege or traditional access. I've unapologetically spoken truth to power, always with the intention of creating space for others to step into theirs.

Second, over the past five years, my office has led or co-sponsored more than 20 pieces of legislation, establishing new city departments and positions while securing millions in

community investments. Key accomplishments include creating the Office of Black Male Advancement and the Office of Cultural Affairs, codifying the Offices of Immigrant Advancement and LGBTQIA2S+ Advancement, and passing the Retail Residential Kitchen ordinance to expand home-based small business opportunities, all through a community-driven co-governance model.

Third, and because not everything can be solved by a policy, I have built programs that unite Bostonians across cultures and identities. These include launching the annual Dominican Independence Day Breakfast, hosting multicultural fairs to spotlight diverse small businesses, holding annual clothing drives, and so much more.

### **7. When not on the campaign trail, how do you relax?**

As a single mother running for office who also serves in office, this is indeed a difficult question to answer. That said, I was really grateful to go back to the Dominican Republic this July and spend quality time with my daughter.

## **Section 2: POLITICS & ELECTIONS**

### **1. What is your party affiliation and how would you characterize your political ideology?**

I am a registered Democrat, and I would characterize my political ideology as progressive, people-centered, and independent.

### **2. Please name up to three (and at least one) of your political role models? Please feel free to explain your choices.**

Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley: As a City Councilor, she was the only one who showed up to community events I hosted, showing me what true representation looks like. When she first ran for Congress, I proudly served as a super volunteer on her groundbreaking campaign. Her historic victory as the first Black woman to represent MA-7 inspired me to say aloud that I could one day be the first Afro-Latina on the Boston City Council. Today, serving my third term in the very seat she once held, that vision has become a reality.

### **3. What would you do to increase voter turnout in the city of Boston, especially for local races?**

I would expand access to the polls, both in terms of education and voting in person (if one chooses to do so). In regard to education, I have been doing programming in non-traditional spaces so that we can meet people where they are at and bring democracy directly to them. For example, I have partnered with barber shops and salons who are discussing climate change, mental health, and other important issues with their clients while they are getting their hair done. This style of programming could be scaled to more spaces and expanded to include the topic of

voting, where our partners can discuss how to register to vote, how to find your sample ballot and polling location, deadlines, and making a plan to vote by mail, early, or in-person.

As for accessing the polls in person, I support same-day registration, which has recently been filed to be on the ballot in 2026, and exploring free MBTA fares on Election Day, as [Cleveland](#) has done. These efforts and more can increase voter turnout in the City, as we would be providing more resources for people to vote.

### Section 3: ISSUES & PRIORITIES

#### **1. What is your top priority if elected? How would you use your role as a city councillor to help address or accomplish it?**

Continuing to strengthen democracy, civic engagement, and accountability by creating meaningful models that center co-governance, participatory democracy, and representation: our office recently passed Ranked Choice Voting in Boston and would work to implement it effectively if re-elected. We aim to restore the Elected School Committee and establish a municipal Office of Inspector General. We are concerned about the decision-making surrounding our schools, such as closures, facilities plans or lack thereof, and more, and we will continue to advocate for culturally competent and neighborhood-centered decision-making processes. Moreover, we are increasing protections for targeted populations through leading the effort to make Boston a Trans and LGBTQIA2S+ Sanctuary City through establishing a groundbreaking Accountability Council; this initiative was co-designed with over 40 LGBTQIA2S+ advocates and we are pushing to pass the ordinance this year. This year and moving forward, we are also focusing on strengthening the Boston Trust Act by closing data-sharing loopholes to ensure local institutions such as schools, health centers, and faith centers are safe for all.

#### **2. Is there a specific city agency you see as in need of urgent reform? If so, please explain.**

I believe that the Boston Planning Development Agency is in need of reform. While I appreciate the effort to transform the BPDA and bring City planning fully under a public department, I do not believe this alone will ensure true transformation. I have called for multiple hearings on initiatives like PLAN, Article 80, and Squares + Streets because, while community engagement may be happening on paper, we continue to hear that resident input is not being meaningfully incorporated. We must move beyond surface-level engagement such as forums, surveys, and timed questions, to deep, sustained community involvement. Now that planning sits under a City department, I will continue to push for accountability by using oversight hearings and budgetary tools to ensure that the department is truly responsive to the people it serves.

#### **3. What is your position on residency requirements, i.e. requiring people hired by the municipal government to live in the city of Boston?**

I support Boston jobs going to Boston residents, but cannot ignore that the residency requirement presents a serious financial burden on our low-wage workers. I have met with workers across the City who are required to live in the City of Boston, but are not paid nearly enough to afford it comfortably. Meanwhile, many high-paid employees being paid using City dollars do not have to live in Boston.

**4. Do you favor a return to an elected School Committee? Please explain.**

Yes, I strongly support an elected School Committee. I have been an advocate for it since 2021 and am the lead sponsor on the Home Rule Petition that is currently in front of the Council. I believe that we must carry out the will of the voters, as 79% of Bostonians supported an elected School Committee in 2021.

**5. Boston is facing a housing shortage that is impacting the affordability of living in the city. Separately, the Wu administration is pursuing zoning reform to spur development in certain areas and wants to see a return of the city's population to 800,000. What is your assessment of this target — and what would your office do to balance growth with the concerns that many have about displacement in neighborhoods?**

To fight displacement while growth is happening, we need to deeply engage the community in all planning and development projects. As the residents absorb new development, community members deserve a real say in what growth in their neighborhoods looks like. Regarding the city's goal of returning to 800,000 residents, I support thoughtful growth that strengthens Boston's economy and vibrancy, but it must not come at the expense of longtime residents. Tools like a displacement tax on large developers and transfer fees on luxury housing and high-value commercial property can help offset the pressures of new development, ensuring that those benefiting most from Boston's real estate market contribute to keeping the city livable and affordable for all.

**6. Do you support the City's current Inclusionary Zoning policy, which was [revised](#) in 2023? If not, what changes would you make?**

Yes, and I am a strong supporter of going even further than this minimum requirement, as too often these affordable units are not truly affordable. The affordability rate is based on a federally set Area Median Income (AMI) that includes wealthy Boston suburbs and ignores the income disparities between Boston neighborhoods. Beyond upholding the minimum affordable unit requirements, I am pushing for a hyper-local AMI so that affordability reflects the actual incomes of residents in the communities where these projects are built.

**7. What is your position on rent control?**

I am proud to be one of the first ten signatories on the recently filed binding ballot petition for 2026 seeking to place a 5% or lower cap on yearly rent increases. Moreover, it is important to

me that this applies to landlords with more than four units, as the intention of rent stabilization is to protect tenants from corporate and investor-driven displacement, while not overburdening small owner-occupants. I will continue standing alongside Right to the City, MAHA, other advocacy groups, and colleagues at the State House to advance the lifting of the rent control prohibition and allow for hyper-local decision making on this issue.

**8. What is your assessment of the Wu administration's overall performance? Please offer a letter grade or pass/fail as part of your answer.**

I would give them an Incomplete. My job as a City Councilor is to hold any Mayoral administration accountable, no matter who is in office. I will continue pushing for robust community engagement in all projects, equitable distribution of resources, and full transparency on how city dollars are benefiting all neighborhoods. As always, there is more work to be done.

**9. The August 2024 closure of Carney Hospital left a huge hole in the city's public health sector. What would you do as a city councillor to address this problem and what is your position on how the Dorchester campus of Carney Hospital should be re-purposed or re-developed?**

I was very vocal about the closure of Carney Hospital, including with an op-ed in the Boston Globe. To prevent this in the future, we need to collaborate with our state partners. The Department of Public Health (DPH) has [regulations for hospital essential service closures](#), but as stated on the page linked, "DPH cannot legally require a hospital to keep a service open." I would like to explore strengthening DPH's ability to enforce the state regulations so that bad actors like Steward Health Care can close facilities without following the proper process in the future. As for how Carney Hospital should be re-purposed or re-developed, I believe we should engage community and work in partnership to identify the best use of the space for our City.

**10. What are your plans to address traffic congestion, commuter safety and transportation needs? Please discuss bike lanes as part of your answer.**

I believe we must address this issue through a localized, community-driven approach. Sweeping changes that overlook potential consequences often leave residents feeling disenfranchised and resistant to improvements. Transportation equity must be a priority, ensuring historically underserved neighborhoods—often communities of color and low-income residents—have safe streets, better pedestrian crossings, and accessible transit options. For MBTA commuters, we need expanded hours, more reliable service, and additional free routes.

When it comes to bike lanes, a localized approach is also essential. Bringing together all stakeholders (residents, cyclists, business owners, and city planners) will allow us to find the most effective routes that meet the needs of the entire community.

**11. How will you approach the issue of gun violence in our communities?**

We need to look at the great work many of our nonprofit and community leaders have done in this space. Too often we push off the work of government to these leaders, and it is time for the government to do its job in collaboration with non-governmental actors. In particular, I would look for investment in proven anti-violence measures that are already being used in community.

I also have fought hard for more funding for youth jobs and programming to help alleviate the gun violence we see in our streets and engage our youth in meaningful ways that contribute to their personal and professional development. Finally, we need to advocate for real gun reform with our colleagues on the state and federal level so we can get guns off the street.

**12. How would you confront the drug epidemic, safety, and sanitation issues affecting residents near Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard?**

The situation at Mass and Cass is a very complex issue that requires deep investments in many areas, such as preventative treatment, housing, mental health services, and more. We need to move with urgency. One thing to note is we cannot legislate human behavior, and thus we need to get at the root causes of these issues. So, while we are investing in fixing the current situation, we also need heavy investments in methods, programs, and resources to ensure others are not faced with the same situation as those suffering at Mass and Cass.

**13. According to DESE's most recent data, 40.4% of Boston's public schools were classified as 'requiring assistance or intervention. In June 2022, Boston Public Schools entered into an agreement with the state to make improvements to the state of the Boston Public Schools. As the agreement expired in June, how would you work to ensure continued accountability for the City's schools, close achievement gaps and ensure that all BPS students receive a quality education?**

I have been the loudest voice on the Council in advocating for the restoration of accountability and democracy in our school systems through bringing back an Elected School Committee. We strongly push for an Elected School Committee because we believe that true accountability can be reached when decision-makers are chosen by AND answer to the people. We have seen the harm done by an appointed system; from trying to move the O'Bryant to West Roxbury, to pure neglect for much needed Madison Park renovations, black and brown students are consistently overlooked, and their voices and those of their families must be elevated in order to change that.

Moreover, advancing an elected structure would mean honoring the will of the people. In 2021, we put this very question on the ballot, and it received nearly 80% support from Boston voters. We then filed and passed a home-rule petition on the Council to honor the voters' mandate. Unfortunately it did not make it past the Mayor's desk.

Despite that reality, we are still pushing for greater accountability both through bringing back the Elected School Committee and through other avenues. In 2024, we also passed a resolution aimed at halting the relocation of the O'Bryant out of concerns for transportation equity. This

year, we have been outspoken about the need for Madison Park to receive necessary renovations this year as initially promised by the administration. In budget hearings with BPS, we spoke up about the lack of metrics measuring our students' long-term success after leaving ELL programs, and more. All in all, while our oversight of the Boston Public Schools is indeed limited, we must continue using our microphones to push bold, community-driven solutions that prioritize student equity, transparency, and long-term investment.

**14.81.6% of BPS students are classified as high needs, compared to 55.8% at the state level. Do you believe that BPS is adequately serving high needs students, including English language learners and special education students, and if not, what can be done to improve their approach?**

The numbers do not lie. We need to do better for our ELL students and special education students. This means hiring more culturally competent teachers, more specialized support staff, more translation access for families, more accountability in ensuring special education plans are followed, and keeping class sizes small so every student gets the attention they need. We also need to make sure that we put more metrics in place that measure the returns on these investments and track whether students are making real progress, so we can adjust strategies and resources where they're needed most.

**15. Most of Boston's revenues come from property taxes, and robust new growth in recent years has enabled substantial budgetary increases, an average of 5.4% over the last decade. However, new growth in FY25 was \$90.5M, 25.7% less than FY24, and a slowdown in new construction in the city may impact future proceeds from the new growth that drives the City's budget. How will you approach these budget challenges and balance the needs of residents and commercial property owners?**

One effort I am championing alongside community is establishing a municipal Inspector General, which would increase transparency and accountability in City government, but also could help us identify much needed dollars to stand in the gap of federal funding cuts and revenue growth shortfalls. Municipal Inspectors General have proven to be financially effective in other cities; for example, Baltimore's Office of Inspector General found almost \$17 million in waste/savings in 2024, according to their [annual report](#). By rooting out inefficiencies and reallocating resources, we can reduce the pressure to raise property taxes, which disproportionately burden low- and middle-income residents, while also keeping Boston competitive and attractive to commercial property owners.

Thank you for participating in the Boston Municipal Research Bureau/Dorchester Reporter questionnaire. Please send the completed document as a PDF or WordDoc to [dhalky@bmr.org](mailto:dhalky@bmr.org) by Friday, Aug. 15, 2025.