

Fall 2019

**Boston City Council Candidates  
Public Safety Questionnaire**

**Candidate: Annissa Essaibi-George**

## 1. Immigration and Policing

Thousands of people are arrested each year in the City of Boston for minor offenses like driving without a license, drug possession, and disorderly conduct. Data obtained by the ACLU shows these minor arrests disproportionately impact Black and Latinx Bostonians. Each time the Boston Police arrest someone, there is the potential for ICE to be notified — putting our immigrant neighbors at substantially greater risk for detention and deportation. Charges for these minor arrests are often dropped, but there is collateral, and often irreparable, damage.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to limit the number of arrests for minor offenses in Boston? Please list your policy goals related to this issue.

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *The most important ways to reduce arrests for minor offenses in Boston are through effective diversion programs for non-violent drug offenders and fully funding after school programs for our most at-risk youth. With such a significant number of minor offenses stemming from addiction, we need to direct funding and programming to effective recovery and mental health services. As Chair of the City Council's Committee on Homelessness, Mental Health & Addiction, I have worked tirelessly to achieve this goal.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you encourage the police commissioner to exercise greater discretion and stop making arrests for minor offenses?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *Yes*

The Boston Police Department's (BPD) existing policies allow officers and intelligence analysts to collect and share information about people who are not suspected of criminal activity with the federal government. For example, the Boston Regional Intelligence Center (BRIC) is a unit of the Boston Police Department that gathers, analyzes, and shares intelligence — like the gang database — with federal law enforcement. However, the database disproportionately documents men of color, using broad identification criteria. The BRIC possesses an unknown amount of information about Boston residents, is not subject to public oversight, and has the power to put people at risk of surveillance, police stops, and deportation.<sup>1</sup> Data from the BRIC was recently used to deport at least one Boston Public School student, when a BPD incident report — which contained unsubstantiated allegations that the student was a gang member — was shared with ICE.<sup>2</sup> The BPD's information collection and sharing policy puts immigrants, people of color, protesters, and journalists at risk when that information is shared with federal agencies under the Trump administration.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to create transparency and oversight of the BRIC? What will you do to address the Boston Police Department's policy

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<sup>1</sup> Dooling, S. (2019, July 26). Here's What We Know About Boston Police's Gang Database. Retrieved from <https://www.wbur.org/news/2019/07/26/boston-police-gang-database-immigration>.

<sup>2</sup> Dooling, S. (2018, December 13). What A Boston Student's Deportation Reveals About School Police And Gang Intelligence. Retrieved from <https://www.wbur.org/news/2018/12/13/east-boston-student-discipline-to-deportation>.

of sharing information about people not suspected of criminal activity with the federal government?

***ESSAIBI-GEORGE:*** *I have supported our Trust Act as passed by the Boston City Council every year since being elected, and I will continue fighting the Trump Administration's disastrous policies as a City Councilor.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support ending the gang database?

***ESSAIBI-GEORGE:*** *I believe that our public safety officers should have access to the most effective tools and training necessary to keep Bostonians safe and healthy. We do need to have measures in place to protect falsely adding any individual to this database, but with gang activity being a major contributor to the violent crime that we have in Boston, it is critical to make every effort to keep our residents safe.*

## 2. Surveillance of Muslims

Boston was named a pilot city for a federal "countering violent extremism" (CVE) campaign in 2014. Since then, a number of Boston institutions, including the Boston Police Department, have been involved with programs funded by CVE grants. One such program, the Youth and Police Initiative Plus, focuses on Somali youth who are deemed a potential threat due to the social and economic trauma that they experience as immigrants and refugees. CVE programs across the country have NOT made communities safer, but instead have deterred political participation and access to social services for Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to ensure funding is available to support social services for immigrant communities, and that this funding is not tied to law enforcement?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *As City Councilor, I have worked to bring new voices into the political process through aggressive community outreach. I've been part of efforts to bring City Council hearings and meetings into our neighborhoods. My staff speaks 5 languages, and we have engaged diverse networks of Bostonians – especially as it relates to giving BPS parents a louder voice in government.*

*In Boston we have a wealth of organizations that offer support services for our immigrant community with and without religious affiliation and without ties to law enforcement. These efforts need to be continued and enhanced, especially for students new to our school system and require language services*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support ending BPD's involvement in any community outreach programs that credit false and stigmatizing theories about predispositions toward violence or "extremism," including Youth and Police Initiative Plus?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *Our residents, regardless of immigration status, should feel safe in our City. Unfortunately they often don't. We need to continue to work on their behalf, in partnership with the BPD, to reassure them of our efforts. The Council previously passed, without opposition, the Trust Act and restated its support for it during this term. Our residents should also not fear that information about them is collected and shared when they are not suspected of criminal activity and the Council should continue to work to support efforts to ensure those practices are not happening.*

Law enforcement should not investigate people unless officers have reasonable, articulable suspicion of involvement in criminal activity. The FBI does not require a criminal predicate for Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) investigations, which often have no connection to anything ordinary people would recognize as terrorist activity; in fact, current federal policy allows the FBI to investigate anyone based on no suspicion of criminality whatsoever. The problematic relationship between local law enforcement and the Joint Terrorism Task Force has been recognized by San Francisco, CA and Portland, OR. As a result, both cities have

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<sup>3</sup> Fact Sheet: Countering Violent Extremism: Myths and Facts: Brennan Center for Justice. (2015, November 02). Retrieved from <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/countering-violent-extremism-myths-and-facts>.

formally cut ties with the Joint Terrorism Task Force.<sup>4/5</sup> BPD collaboration with the FBI, which has historically targeted Muslims for improper surveillance and entrapment operations, puts Muslim Bostonians at risk of federal harassment.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to protect Muslim Bostonians and activists from unwarranted federal harassment and surveillance?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *As the daughter of an Arab Muslim, it is important to me that we protect every Bostonian from improper surveillance. We need to ensure the civil rights of our residents are upheld and the goals of liberty held firm in our City. We need to embrace and welcome all immigrants to this City and make sure we have policies in place that protect them from racial and cultural bias.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support efforts to end BPD collaboration with the Joint Terrorism Task Force, as the City of San Francisco has done?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *As City Councilor, I look forward to working closely with law enforcement, community stakeholders, advocates, and residents to ensure that we are keeping our neighborhoods safe while protecting the civil liberties of all residents.*

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<sup>4</sup> Nakashima, E. (2017, March 10). San Francisco Police Department pulls out of FBI anti-terrorism task force. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/san-francisco-police-department-pulls-out-of-fbi-anti-terrorism-task-force/2017/03/10/62e05bcc-fd09-11e6-8f41-ea6ed597e4ca\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/san-francisco-police-department-pulls-out-of-fbi-anti-terrorism-task-force/2017/03/10/62e05bcc-fd09-11e6-8f41-ea6ed597e4ca_story.html).

<sup>5</sup> FAQ on withdrawing from the Joint Terrorism Task Force. (2019, February 12). Retrieved from <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/hardesty/article/712320>.

### 3. Racial Profiling

According to data from the Boston Police Department, as analyzed and reported by The Boston Globe, 70 percent of the nearly 15,000 individuals that police observed, interrogated, or searched in 2016 were Black. Meanwhile, Black people make up 25 percent of the population in Boston.<sup>6</sup> Black and Brown people are also punished more harshly than white people for drug offenses. Although people of color in Boston make up less than 28 percent of people convicted of drug possession, they are roughly 55 percent of those convicted of drug distribution and 75 percent of those convicted of mandatory minimum drug offenses.<sup>7</sup> Similar disparities encouraged the City of Providence to require data collection of any police stops or searches through the Community-Police Relations Safety Act.<sup>8</sup>

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to eliminate racial bias in policing, besides previously proposed plans of hiring more officers of color?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *We need to continue efforts to improve broken relationships between our communities and the police and support programs that have improved those relationships. As a City Councilor I will continue to support efforts to improve those relationships, provide additional opportunities for training and create more opportunities for collaboration between our law enforcement officers and the residents of the City.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you work to make the Boston Police Department conduct an audit of their arrest data, to include racial disparities in arrest rates for drug offenses?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *Yes.*

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<sup>6</sup> Ransom, J. (2017, August 29). Blacks remain focus of Boston police investigations, searches. Retrieved from <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/08/28/blacks-remain-focus-boston-police-investigations-searches/PDbFr2QZexCEi3zJTO9mOJ/story.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Surveys of Massachusetts sentencing practices. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.mass.gov/lists/surveys-of-massachusetts-sentencing-practices>.

<sup>8</sup> Providence Community-Police Relations Act. (n.d.). Retrieved from [https://providenceri.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail\\_Legifile.aspx?MeetingID=6206&ID=3786](https://providenceri.iqm2.com/Citizens/Detail_Legifile.aspx?MeetingID=6206&ID=3786).

## 4. Drug Arrests

According to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the opioid overdose death rate is 120 times higher for those recently released from incarceration compared to the rest of the adult population.<sup>9</sup> While the overdose and drug contamination crises have moved some politicians to discuss the importance of harm reduction services and a public health response, our local and statewide laws and budgets still prioritize punishment rather than a public health response to drug use. For over 50 years, the criminalization of drugs and of people who use and sell drugs has failed to curtail drug use and substance use disorder; the policy has also led to the arrest, punishment, and imprisonment of hundreds of thousands of people — a majority of whom are people of color — and limited resources for education, treatment, economic empowerment, housing, and other social services outside the criminal legal system.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what are your policy proposals to increase access to long-term treatment, limit arrests for drugs, and implement evidence-based harm reduction services, such as safe consumption spaces?

***ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** Since arriving on the Council, I have proudly served as Chair on the Committee on Homelessness, Mental Health & Recovery. On this committee, I have prioritized ensuring better quality of life for those experiencing opioid addiction, creating safer spaces to seek recovery, and improving the overall health of the City of Boston. I believe that increasing the number of long-term recovery beds across our City is a critical to providing individuals with substance abuse disorder with the treatment and continuum of care services to achieve recovery.*

*I have played an important role in the conversations and planning for the reopening of Long Island and the plans for programming on the island to support those seeking recovery. I have held hearings in collaboration with my colleagues about Long Island and have submitted testimony to the State regarding the need to reopen access to Long Island.*

*In addition to my consistent advocacy for the re-opening of the Long Island Recovery Campus, I support increasing operation hours of the two syringe exchanges and expanding the staffing and resources to meet the demand for recovery services. I have advocated for these policy improvements during every budget cycle since 2016, as well as increased investments in the Boston SUSTAINS program; making the Engagement Center a permanent resource for those suffering from addiction and homelessness; supporting the Post Overdose Response Team (PORT) initiative; and increasing funding for PAATHS.*

*In the aftermath of the war on drugs, I believe the City has an obligation to reform our approach to law enforcement in interactions when interacting with individuals dealing with substance abuse disorder. When I arrived on the City Council, I was proud to partner with my former colleague, Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley, to quadruple the City BEST Program, the team of emergency services clinicians that partner with police officers relationship to provide mental health and de-escalation services. The BEST*

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<sup>9</sup> Chapter 55 Data Visualization. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://chapter55.digital.mass.gov/>.

*clinicians ride with police officers to provide critical support and intervention for individuals in times of crisis. I have consistently advocated for the expansion of the BEST program to hire a minimum of 23 additional clinicians to guarantee ensure healthy and compassionate interactions with law enforcement. I also support requiring officers to carry narcane and naloxone.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support curtailing law enforcement responses to drug use, ending arrests for personal possession and small sales of all drugs, and instead implementing a public health referral response based on human rights?

***ESSAIBI-GEORGE:*** *I support increased funding for effective drug treatment programs to make our communities safer and healthier and focusing law enforcement efforts on dealers and traffickers who prey on others.*



## 5. Electronic and Digital Privacy

In June, the City of Somerville became the first East Coast city to ban municipal use of facial recognition technology. This technology is replete with racial and gender bias. Private companies are aggressively pushing its use on police departments across Massachusetts, endangering people's civil rights and civil liberties. There are currently no statutory protections in place to guard against abuse or misuse of this flawed and biased surveillance technology.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to ensure Bostonians' privacy rights aren't being invaded by face surveillance technology?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *Every Bostonian is entitled to live in a safe and healthy community with their privacy rights not invaded. As a City, it is imperative that we establish clear policy and directives when it comes to new technology. I look forward to engaging in that discussion on the City Council and holding the Administration accountable in preserving the individual liberties of our residents.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you vote in favor of an ordinance to ban the municipal government from using face surveillance technology, as Somerville, San Francisco, and Oakland have done?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *I look forward to learning more about the impacts of face surveillance technology from organizations such as the ACLU and from experts in technology and law enforcement to be able to craft the most appropriate ordinance possible.*

Cities and counties across the country, including Cambridge and Lawrence, Massachusetts, have enacted policies to require transparency and City Council approval of surveillance technology acquisitions by city agencies.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to ensure transparency and democratic accountability around new surveillance technology acquisitions?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *I look forward to learning more about the impacts of face surveillance technology from organizations such as the ACLU and from experts in technology and law enforcement to be able to craft the most appropriate ordinance possible.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you vote in favor of an ordinance to require City Council approval before city agencies use or acquire surveillance technologies?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *Yes.*

## 6. Plainclothes Policing

Several tactical units of the Boston Police Department patrol in plainclothes. They often drive unmarked vehicles while wearing street clothes. We lack crucial public information about the Youth Violence Strike Force, the Drug Control Unit, or the Anti-Crime units. This missing information includes: number of officers, budget, equipment used, complaints received, stops made, and arrest data. In New York City, plainclothes police officers are involved disproportionately in fatal shootings.<sup>10</sup>

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what will you do to ensure transparency and assess the impact of tactical units on community wellbeing?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *We will begin by collecting and publishing data regarding spending, equipment used, complaints against, stops and arrests for all plain-clothes tactical units. We will evaluate post data collection how best these tactical units can effectively serve the communities they patrol and whether plain clothed policing is the best practice to employ.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support the abolition of plainclothes policing?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *No response.*

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<sup>10</sup> The Intercept. (2018, May 09). Plainclothes NYPD Cops Are Involved in a Staggering Number of Killings. Retrieved from <https://theintercept.com/2018/05/09/saheed-vassell-nypd-plain-clothes/>.

## 7. Overtime Spending

Within a budget of more than \$414 million for FY2020, the Boston Police Department budget allocated over \$58 million for overtime.<sup>11</sup> Police overtime spending exceeds spending on youth jobs and community centers.<sup>12</sup> Current overtime policies allow for excessive spending, including a mandate that officers testifying in court are paid for a minimum of four hours even if they're in court for less than an hour. Boston Police officers also collect pay for thousands of hours for construction details, while civilians flaggers work those sites in other cities and states.

If elected or reelected to the City Council what will you do to curb excessive overtime spending and invest in community social services?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *Throughout my tenure on the Council, I have established a strong record- attending every budget hearing, including the budget for BPD, over the past 4 years. That record includes my strict scrutiny about opportunities for savings and re-allocating funding that reflect the priorities of our constituents. Since my first budget cycle, I continue hold all departments accountable to their 'truth in budgeting' policies with regard to police overtime and their commitment to promised \$9 million reductions in overtime spending. The recent creation of the Bureau of Community Engagement in BPD is a testament the advocacy during the budget process in City Council to realize savings. I continue to be a strong support of the efforts to strengthen community policing and building stronger relationships and trust between law enforcement and residents. Throughout the budget, I have a proven record of requesting concrete and specific descriptions of funding allocations for community social services to ensure fiscal responsibility.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you work to impose stricter limitations on police overtime spending and invest cost savings in housing, education, youth jobs, and drug treatment?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *Yes.*

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<sup>11</sup> City of Boston. (2019, June 13). Budget. Retrieved from <https://www.boston.gov/departments/budget>.

<sup>12</sup> "Budget | Boston.gov." <https://www.boston.gov/departments/budget>. Accessed 2 Jul. 2019.

## 8. Transparency and Public Accountability

The Boston Police Department has made some progress in terms of opening its data to the public. But currently, arrest data and stop-and-frisk data are not available to the public on an ongoing basis via the city's data portal. These data can be posted online without compromising the privacy of Boston residents. Stop-and-frisk and arrest data are critical to understanding the impact of policing in Boston.

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what data will you use to evaluate police performance?

***ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** Police performance is measured in a number of different ways and includes data related to safety perception, statistics of crime data and the decrease of all crime in all neighborhoods and improved relations with our residents. All data relative to crime and arrest data should be available for review.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you work to make Boston Police arrest data and stop-and-frisk data, including race information, available to the public in real time?

***ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** Yes.*

## 9. Community Oversight

While Boston has taken steps to allow for community review of civilian complaints against police officers, in the form of the Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel (CO-OP), the panel has limited power to hold officers accountable. The current CO-OP is made up of a former judge, and a former city employee. In their 2018 report, the members found that only 25 percent of cases that they reviewed were found to be not fair, not thorough, or both.<sup>13</sup>

If elected or reelected to the City Council, what steps will you take to increase accountability and community oversight over policing in our neighborhoods?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *I support the Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel as a tool for the community to oversee police actions in our neighborhoods, as well as all efforts to increase the communication between police and the community.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you support replacing the CO-OP with a well-funded, independent, community-based complaint review body with the power to subpoena, investigate, discipline, and fire police officers?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *No response.*

In response to input from Boston community members, the Boston Police Department is in the process of implementing a limited body-worn camera program. Unfortunately, the program includes a dangerous provision allowing officers to review body camera footage before writing incident reports. Criminal defendants, on the other hand, do not have the same right to view incident footage before giving statements to police.

Please describe the role you think body cameras should play at the Boston Police Department.

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *I will implement a police body camera program without delay because cameras are a crucial part of transparent and accountable policing. I am proud to have worked with members of the community to sponsor the legislation pushing for the adoption of a body camera program that the Walsh Administration has dragged its feet on. Research indicates that camera use can reduce use of force as well as civilian complaints.*

If elected or reelected to the City Council, will you work to change the body-worn camera policy to prohibit officers from viewing footage prior to writing incident reports?

**ESSAIBI-GEORGE:** *No response.*

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<sup>13</sup> City of Boston. (2018, July). Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel. Retrieved from [https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/document-file-07-2018/annual\\_report\\_2017\\_2016.pdf](https://www.boston.gov/sites/default/files/document-file-07-2018/annual_report_2017_2016.pdf).