

Fall 2019

**Boston City Council Candidates  
Public Safety Questionnaire**

**Candidate: Lydia Edwards**

## 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.

**EDWARDS:**

*First, I support updating the Boston Trust Act ordinance and passing the statewide Work and Family Mobility Act and Safe Communities Act. These laws will help ensure (1) Boston police and other police forces are not participating in immigration enforcement and (2) residents can safely and legally drive regardless of their immigration status.*

*I support strategies to reduce criminalization of Boston residents, ensure an accountable justice system and invest in community-led public safety solutions. For example, I would be favorable toward policies that:*

*(1) advance restorative justice and opportunities to “repair the harm”*

*(2) enhance data collection on arrests*

*(3) require public approval of public surveillance and restrict communication with federal agencies*

*(4) increase or newly dedicate budgetary line items toward violence prevention*

*With that said, I have focused council and legislative efforts on housing, workers’ rights and economic justice issues, because I believe that stability, safety and dignity are contingent on providing every person with basic necessities, first and foremost a roof over one’s head.*

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?

**EDWARDS:** *Yes. To be clear, I believe most effective use of this tool will be pointing to specific examples, categories of offenses and suggestions for alternative resolutions of relevant scenarios. I am open to discussion with advocates on strategies for reducing minor arrests.*

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

**EDWARDS:** *Updating the Trust Act and regulating surveillance are two important steps forward in this regard. I also support regulating the exchange of information with agencies outside of the City of Boston, requiring much greater disclosure of who gets what and why, and ending such exchanges if necessary, particular with regards to federal agencies that may participate in (1) immigration enforcement or (2) racial profiling or surveillance of target populations.*

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

**EDWARDS:** *I support regulating, and ending if necessary, the gang database. In concept, I am not opposed to having a database to help address issues like gang violence or human trafficking. However, I am extremely concerned with the racial disparity in who is tracked, general assumptions of guilt by association, information sharing with other agencies, and the lack of due process for removing oneself from the database.*

*What I can firmly say YES to is:*

- 1. I will support legislation to regulate the gang database, increase transparency, end unfounded guilt-by-association and enable due process appeals*
- 2. I would support ending the database if regulation and reform efforts are not successful*

---

<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>.

## 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?

**EDWARDS:** *First, I would be happy to work with advocates to discuss or elevate review of grant funding that comes through the city council for approval.*

*I believe more substantial progress on civil rights, civic participation, and surveillance issues impacting the Muslim community would require deep engagement with the Muslim community across the city, the Office of Immigrant Advancement, and public safety agencies. I am happy to be a partner in that, but would defer to impacted groups as far as the top priority issues, or areas where the city itself has leverage to act.*

*The city council can use public hearings to clarify the purpose and intent of grants and vote to reject grants or restrict their use if needed. If the structure of federal programs is the issue, engagement with our congressional delegation would be appropriate.*

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?

**EDWARDS:** *Yes, I would support ending programs that cause or exacerbate stigma of any population, or promote ideas that are harmful or discriminatory. With that said, while I am firm in my convictions, I do believe in direct dialogue and discussing issues directly with critics, participants and law enforcement before calling for any program's cessation. I have not engaged in direct dialogue re: YPIP+ at this time.*

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

---

<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?

***EDWARDS:*** *I have been a vocal advocate for the right of Muslim Americans and Arab Americans regardless of their religion to live, celebrate their culture and enjoy society with the full freedom and opportunity our country promises to all residents. As noted, I support updating the Boston Trust Act ordinance and the Safe Communities Act. These laws will help ensure Boston police and other police forces are not participating in immigration enforcement. I would also support greater scrutiny or regulation of how Boston accepts and expends federal grant money and regulation of surveillance and data sharing. I am open to other ideas that would directly support and protect the Muslim community.*

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?

***EDWARDS:*** *Yes*

---

<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?

**EDWARDS:** *I believe shifting funds toward violence prevention and job creation, and considering city-level ordinances comparable to Providence Community Safety Act are both important strategies. I also believe securing adequate housing fundamentally changes the social and economic pressures on an individual or family and believe that these changes can be transformative.*

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?

**EDWARDS:** *Yes, I would support requirements to do so.*

---

<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?

**EDWARDS:** *Based on dialogue to date, I do support safe consumption spaces but, if asked to dedicate a limited set of funds, would focus first on access to treatment and housing. I view safe consumption as a harm-reduction strategy as opposed to a solution to the root causes. To that extent, I am more concerned with poverty, inadequate housing, a medical system that has overprescribed addictive drugs, inadequate access to healthcare and approaches that criminalize as opposed to treat drug use.*

*When developing policy proposals or positions regarding substance abuse prevention and treatment, I do and will take the lead of people in recovery. Using the same principle, I understand it's critical to engage populations who are in fact not yet in "recovery" from drug use.*

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?

**EDWARDS:** *Yes, I support curtailing arrests for drug use and possession and utilizing a public health response.*

---

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

## 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?

**EDWARDS:** *I support a ban on facial surveillance technology.*

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?

**EDWARDS:** *Yes*

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?

**EDWARDS:** *I have previously asked the Boston Police Department to identify surveillance technologies, database and relevant software. I would happily repeat the request or partner on legislation to establish transparency and an approval process.*

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?

**EDWARDS:** *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?

***EDWARDS:** I agree that data points presented should be made available to the city council and the public and would support efforts to do so.*

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

***EDWARDS:** At this time, and lacking the data points suggested above, I do not have a yes or no position on this question.*

---

<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?

***EDWARDS:** I believe addressing this issue during the budgetary process and elevating the issue prior to a next stage of collective bargaining would be appropriate. I also believe certain traffic and transportation functions could be made civilian positions.*

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?

***EDWARDS:** Yes*

---

<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?

***EDWARDS:** I appreciate the ACLU and other stakeholders' efforts to analyze or request data such as Field Interrogation Observation (FIO) stops and to look at racial disparities. I would be interested in data related to arrests on low-level offenses, drug arrests or crimes, neighborhood, income and demographic disparities and surveillance.*

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?

***EDWARDS:** 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?

**EDWARDS:** *In general, I would support greater neighborhood or council/legislative control over how public safety funds are spent, what equipment or technology is deployed, and accountability mechanisms, I would support any oversight board or panel holding subpoena power and having community or a mix of appointments.*

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?

**EDWARDS:** *Yes*

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.

**EDWARDS:** *I believe body cameras should be used to increase accuracy and factual basis in any police or judicial encounters, mitigate personal biases or errors in memory and ensure public servants work in the public interest. I also believe they should be deployed in a manner that preserves individuals' privacy wherever possible and averts unnecessary surveillance or aggressive prosecution of violations that could be disposed of in a non-criminal fashion.*

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?

**EDWARDS:** *Yes*

---

<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).