

MARIA'S LIST

Maria Jobin-Leeds
DEMOCRACY & EDUCATION

BOSTON CITY COUNCIL AT-LARGE CANDIDATES Amplifying New Women of Color Voices July 2019

[Julia Mejia](#)

[Alejandra St. Guillen](#)

[Priscilla Flint-Banks](#)

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Julia Mejia

Running for Boston City Council At-Large

Election Dates: Primary – Sept 24th; General – November 5th

When **Julia** was five years old, she immigrated to the US from the Dominican Republic. Because she was raised by an undocumented, single mother, she learned at a very early age about advocacy in order to put food on the table, including learning to advocate for her family with the welfare office and other government agencies. It taught her at an early age how to fight. Growing up, Julia cleaned offices with her mother and has been working since she was 12. Her first job was at an insurance agency. She told them “put together a flyer and I’ll tell everyone about you” and made \$26.

She dropped out of school in the 9th grade but went back to Dorchester High School and became the first in her family to graduate high school at 19.5 years old. Her and her mom couldn’t afford to live in one place and, because her mom was undocumented, they had to move from place to place. Because she bounced around schools so much, she attended almost every single school in Boston. **Julia** was 10 years old when her and her mom finally had their own place, and one where they stayed for longer than a year and long enough for her to graduate from school. That is what has informed her life and she has dedicated her life to community since.

In her 20s, after college, she worked in the nonprofit sector. The only reason she graduated from high school was a visit to her school by Ms. Liz Walker, the first black reporter in Massachusetts. Inspired by Ms. Walker, **Julia** moved to NYC to be a reporter. She worked at MTV, where she covered a presidential campaign and worked on MTV’s Rock the Vote campaign. At MTV, she was dedicated to amplifying the voices of young people and ensuring that black and brown voices were heard.

In 2009, she moved back to Boston because she noticed that violence in her city was on the rise. She worked with a marketing agency, helping and training nonprofits on how to raise awareness of their issues. Then, **Julia** became pregnant and needed health insurance, so she went to work for Goodwill. There, she did workforce development for women transitioning out of welfare. As part of that, she created a curriculum for those women, and all the women she trained there are still employed. That's where she learned about the education gap, because almost all of the women had an interrupted education and/or their GED.

Julia then went to work for the Massachusetts Charter Association as a parent organizer. Her niece was at Excel and she thought they were doing a good job. She didn't realize how political the conversation was. While working at the Massachusetts Charter Association, she wanted to create a formal voice for charter parents and created a network. It was initially meant just for parents with kids at charter schools but after a few meetings, she knew they had parents whose kids tended all types of schools. The ballot question (Question 2: lifting the cap on the number of Massachusetts charters) was coming, so she pulled the network (CPLAN) out of the Massachusetts Charter Association but kept working with CPLAN. Charters were unhappy about that.

Now, the work CPLAN does with parents is focused on helping parents troubleshoot issues they are having with their district schools; they "coach them through to a win." For example, CPLAN coaches parents to have a better relationship with administrators so that their kids stay in their schools. Through CPLAN, **Julia** helps schools improve in how they work with black and brown families and does parent leadership development through contracts with the Boston Public Schools and the Massachusetts Department of Education. They work with BPS' ELL population and are working with Community Academy to redesign their governance structure and parent advisory committee in partnership with parents and educators. She serves on the BPS ELL Taskforce, which is appointed by School Committee. Five CPLAN parents have been appointed to statewide education boards.

Key Policy Priorities

- ***Housing*** — Because of her own lived experience, she is creating a platform from the ground up. She is convening people from across experiences (developers, people who have been displaced, those living in affordable housing) to create a platform all agree on and then sharing that platform with activists to make sure everyone is aligned. Currently, inclusionary development policy requires 13% affordable housing in new developments; she wants to get that to 30%. (Others are pushing for 20%.) She doesn't want to let developers opt out of affordable housing. It's important to also support mom and pop landlords to stabilize rents. She believes in rent control. She knows what it was like to have a stable home and also what it's like to not have her own space for a long time.

- **Transportation** — It's bubbled up as a major concern for a lot of people so she sent a newsletter out about it.
 - Expand student and senior passes and introduce new, more inclusive policies - low-income passes, fare-free days/routes, etc.
 - Create more transportation options, regardless of neighborhood – She wants to study the disparity of commute times and transit accessibility across Boston's neighborhoods, work to expand the T and other services into underserved communities, advocate to expand and increase bus service across the city and expand bus-only lanes which have proven successful in neighborhoods such as Roslindale.
 - Embrace and execute 'pedestrians first policies', to get people out of cars and into public transit, including increasing crosswalk timing particularly for our disabled, elderly and children and connecting all our bike lane and protecting our riders with median-separated bike lanes throughout all of Boston.
 - Support state-level legislation to add congestion pricing in Boston's tolls and tunnels, with higher rates during peak hours of traffic. Also, she wants to add higher taxes on ride shares such as Uber and Lyft.
 - Advocate transitioning our city fleet of cars and public transit vehicles to electric.
 - Advocate for the Fair Share Amendment and put the revenue into repairing and expanding our infrastructure, extending free passes to seniors and students, and beginning to pilot reduced and no-fare bus routes within low-income neighborhoods.
 - Bring back the late-night T service so that late-night riders can have access to safe, reliable transportation and work alongside T operators to ensure that this initiative considers workers' safety as well as riders.
- **Civic Engagement, Accountability and Transparency** — Process is what matters most. It's not just about what we want but rather the infrastructure needed for real community engagement. That's what's missing and she's the missing link. How she works and what she does can help move things forward. Her first public hearing will be a hearing on public hearings, and she'll offer childcare and remove barriers to being involved.
- **Education** — She wants an elected school board. She has been doing a lot of work pushing for the Promise Act (Sonia Chang-Diaz's bill) so schools get the funding they need and the school to prison pipeline ends. She wants to create an inter-agency budget and wraparound model, where all the agencies work together to support the education and learning of all students.
- **On Charter Schools** — For the right reasons, she was on the wrong side of ballot question 2. For her, it was really about giving parents a voice. No matter where kids end up, there is work to do. As a BPS graduate, she knew her own experience. She came into the education space as a parent. She didn't care about charters vs. district schools but came to learn about the

education space. What she learned when working for the Massachusetts Charter Association is that black and brown families were being used. People who are the most impacted need to be informing the debate. As a parent, she knows that black and brown kids walk into the education space with very little options and they can't afford to move to JP to attend better schools. Charters give families more options, but she's come to learn the financial impact that lifting the cap has on district schools. Charter schools were never supposed to compete with district schools but rather be centers of innovations. She has come to believe that the movement is bigger: "to characterize is our damnation." Now, she would not support the growth and expansion of charters. Charters are not the answer. They are just Band-Aids on bullet holes. Her daughter is in a charter and **Julia** wants to pull her out because Julia doesn't have a real voice there. Charter schools have so much autonomy. They are allegedly public but operate privately. Some of the other outcomes aren't about teaching but managing. **Julia** has been speaking out at her daughter's school because her charter school has too much autonomy. She now has a better understanding that the charter movement is not about her people and is not about quality education.

Analysis of Mejia Campaign: **Julia** is running a strong grassroots campaign; she has a disciplined and ambitious door-knocking plan and is building the volunteer base to try and reach it. Over 40 people came to her first canvassing event. She came in second in fundraising for non-incumbents (behind Alejandra St. Guillen who we've also endorsed; read above for more on her), and most of her donations are small-dollar from Boston. Just like with her organization, she says she can do a lot with very little and is running a lean campaign. More financial resources would help her hire additional staff and pay for additional mailings.

Julia and Alejandra were the two women of color endorsed by the Right to the City Vote grassroots coalition, the only multiracial, multilingual and multi-generational political organization in Boston. In line with our [Deep Democracy framework for giving](#), we prioritize supporting candidates who have the backing of coalitions of diverse, grassroots, community-powered organizations.

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Alejandra St. Guillen
Running for Boston City Council At-Large
Election Dates: Preliminary – September 24th;
General – November 5th

The daughter of a Venezuelan immigrant father and a mother from New Hampshire, **Alejandra** was born and raised in the Mission Hill neighborhood of Boston. Her father passed away when **Alejandra** was 13 years old. She graduated from Boston Latin School, Wesleyan University and then City College with her Master's degree in Education. She started her career in education: teaching at public schools in the

Bronx in New York City and then Boston, where she taught at the McKinley Schools for special needs students. After four years as a public school teacher, she worked on issues of high school access at an educational nonprofit.

In 2006, her only sibling Imette, a graduate school student at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City, was murdered just weeks before her graduation by a bouncer at a bar she was at that night while celebrating. Imette's murder garnered national attention and was part of the catalyst for passage of New York legislation requiring that nightclubs have security plans and that bouncers at bars undergo background checks.

"My sister was everything to me," **Alejandra** said. "She looked up to me, and I felt that one of my core duties my entire life was to protect her. And the fact that I wasn't there to do that left me with an incredible amount of guilt and an incredible amount of obligation to see that the life that she didn't get to lead would be lived out by others."

Around that time, she started working at the State House for then-State Senator Dianne Wilkerson's Director of Constituent Services. "That was really my first entrée into the political-slash-government world," **St. Guillen** said. "Service has always been my path, and though I never knew exactly what I wanted to do, I was always in that vein of 'How can we make a difference?' Government was just another avenue to do that, and the level of influence you can have in the state legislature is really significant." Her work with activists at the State House led her to work for Oiste, the long-time pre-eminent political education and advocacy organization for Massachusetts Latinx community, where she served as Executive Director for three years. Among her accomplishments at Oiste, **Alejandra** spearheaded a statewide coalition working on 2011 redistricting that helped create twice as many Massachusetts legislative districts that were majority people of color.

In 2014, **Alejandra** went to work for Boston Mayor Marty Walsh's Office for Immigrant Advancement, where she created the Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund which provides immigrants with volunteer immigration lawyers.

She has a young son Jose Alejandro with her wife Josiane Martinez.

Key Policy Priorities

- **Education** —She supports returning to an elected School Committee or a hybrid model and establishing fairness and transparency in high school exam school admissions. When Black and Latino students make up over 70% of the Boston Public School population and just 40% of the students at our exam schools, there is something clearly unfair with the admissions process. It begins with the use of a test that is not aligned with the Boston Public School curriculum. We can keep the admission process while making it fair for all our students. Additionally, with the myriad of challenges BPS students face in their homes and neighborhoods including homelessness, mixed-status immigrant households, housing and food

insecurity, drug and alcohol addiction and neighborhood violence, every school should be staffed with a school nurse and social worker to provide social and emotional services. Ending the school to prison and deportation pipeline stems from an over-policing of our students in school, especially young men of color, and requires implementing policy that restricts the sharing of information about students and student behavior unless a criminal activity is involved. Lastly, she will advocate for a more equitable way of funding K-12 schools by the state and fully supports Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz's Promise Act, including the more accurate projections of SPED costs and fairer funding for schools with ELL and low-income students.

- **Immigrant Rights** — She is committed to expanding the Trust Act, securing Boston as a sanctuary city and including comprehensive and transparent language to ensure the spirit of the ordinance to protect our immigrant neighbors is carried out on a day-to-day basis. **Alejandra** also wants to increase public funding for the Greater Boston Immigrant Defense Fund. When immigrants face deportation proceedings they are not guaranteed legal counsel resulting in the vast majority of defendants going unrepresented and thus less likely to apply for relief and/or receive that relief. The City should increase the funding to fully fund all Boston residents at risk of being torn apart from their family and community. In Boston, nearly 500 US-born children lose a parent to deportation each year.
- **Affordable Housing** — As a result of redlining in communities of color in the 1940s and predatory loans of the 1990s and early 2000s, communities of color were disproportionately impacted by the foreclosure crisis of the mid-2000s. Now in a booming regional economy, they are on the front lines of gentrification and displacement. The lack of affordable housing has led to high rent burdens, overcrowding, and housing insecurity for a growing number of families, and exacerbates the economic challenges faced by many low and moderate income families. **Alejandra** will focus on advocating for policies aimed at preservation and expansion of affordable housing including:
 - Increasing revenue streams for affordable housing - She supports Councilor Lydia Edwards' ordinance that would tax sales on luxury units as well as units that are flipped. She would also push for full implementation of the PILOT programs to ensure that our large institutions are paying their fair share in support of families and neighborhoods.
 - Support the expansion of community land trusts and expand the Acquisition Opportunity Program (AOP) – She will work closely with organizations and advocates to preserve affordable housing and would advocate that new revenue streams for affordable housing go into the AOP, which allows the City to purchase rental units to keep them permanently affordable.
 - Advocacy on Beacon Hill for more local control – Alejandra supports State Rep. Mike Connolly's bill (H. 4196) that would give municipalities additional tools to address the affordable housing

crisis. She would strongly advocate for the current “Local Option Transfer Fee” bill which allows municipalities to implement a fee on certain real estate transactions in order to increase affordable housing revenue streams.

Status of Seat: All four incumbents are running for re-election to Boston City Council At-Large seats. When Ayanna Pressley won her congressional seat and resigned her council seat, she was replaced by the 5th place finisher, Althea Garrison. Councilor At-Large Garrison is conservative and considered to be very vulnerable; in the 2017 election, she missed making the top four by 25,000 votes.

Analysis of St. Guillen Campaign: Alejandra is running a strong campaign with a lot of momentum. She’s been endorsed by organizations like UNITE HERE Local 26, the LGBTQ Victory Fund and Right to the City Vote as well as by a number of Boston elected officials including City Councilor At-Large Michelle Wu; City Councilor Kim Janey; State Representatives Michael Moran, Adrian Madaro, Ed Coppinger, Nika Elugardo, Dan Cullinane, Jon Santiago, and Liz Malia and State Senator Sal DiDomenico. Of the At-Large challengers, Alejandra has raised the most money. She would be the first Latina on the Boston City Council.

In line with our [Deep Democracy framework for giving](#), we prioritize supporting candidates who have the backing of coalitions of diverse, grassroots, community-powered organizations. As the only multiracial, multilingual and multi-generational political organization in Boston, the Right to the City Vote coalition endorsed two women of color in the Boston At-Large race: **Alejandra** and Julia Mejia (who we’ve also endorsed; see below for more about her). The Right to the City Vote coalition includes grassroots organizations like Chinese Progressive Political Action (CPPA) and Mass Alliance and the coalition was part of the driving force behind Congresswomen Ayanna Pressley and Suffolk County District Attorney Rachael Rollins’ historic wins.

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Priscilla Flint-Banks

Running for Boston City Council At-Large

**Election Dates: Preliminary – September 24th;
General – November 5th**

Priscilla grew up in Roxbury’s Orchard Park housing project. She had her first child when she was 15 years old and tragically lost him in a fire when she was 19. In mourning the loss of her son, she suffered several nervous breakdowns and moved to Alaska before coming back to Boston. She worked in banking and while in banking, was able to go to Cambridge College and earn her master’s degree in business management. She tragically then lost her second son who was seven years old in a car accident.

She worked for the Elderly Commission at the City of Boston and then worked as a housing counselor and foreclosure prevention specialist with the Mass Affordable Housing Alliance (MAHA). MAHA was formed in response to red-lining, when banks

drew a line through Roxbury and signed people up for loans they couldn't afford. The Soft Second program (now ONE Mortgage), which she worked on at MAHA, enabled people to get a special loan; one part was a 1% interest rate and another part was a lower interest rate. 20,000 people have been able to purchase homes for the first time through the Soft Second/One Mortgage program. After working at MAHA, **Priscilla** went back to work for the City of Boston and ran payroll and general services (payroll for retirees) for the City. After two decades there, she retired in 2010. Since then, she has been a founding member of Mass Justice and Equality and served as Treasurer and Membership Coordinator. She's also Chair of the Boston Jobs Coalition.

In 2012, she co-founded the Black Economic Justice Institute (BEJI) in response to the lack of people of color and women hired for construction jobs on development projects across the City of Boston, as was mandated by the Boston Resident Job Policy ordinance. That severe lack was clear in the construction of the Bruce Bolling building, particularly because the late Councilor Bolling had originally written the ordinance. BEJI boycotted and protested at the Bolling Building for over 200 days. They brought so much attention to the lack of compliance with the ordinance that they were able to strengthen the Boston Residents Job Policy, securing an increase in the numbers of women and people of color required to be hired on construction sites in the City as well as additional accountability measures. BEJI also created the Blue Hill Corridor Planning Commission, an initiative working along the Blue Hill Avenue corridor with businesses and residents to give them a voice in the development and planning of the corridor. The Commission stopped a liquor store from opening in Grove Hall, shut down Stop and Shop because of evidence of rodents in the store, and took surveys in the corridor to find out what businesses need. It found that, in particular, they need employee development and technical assistance because small businesses have minimal capacity. In response, the Commission worked to bring city resources and services to them. BEJI also has a radio show called the BEJI Reporter that features community events, brings small businesses on as guests, and works to bring awareness to what's going on in the community.

Key Policy Priorities

- ***Boston Residents Job Policy Ordinance/Economic Development*** — The Boston Residents Job Policy was strengthened and, if enforced, there would be more people of color and women on construction jobs, but at least 75% of the jobs have to be permanent jobs. Currently, people have to work multiple jobs; they go to their construction job for only a few hours and then have to leave to work another job. Workers need to receive benefits from these jobs. Small businesses need to receive technical assistance and back office assistance, so they'll be able to thrive. The Boston Employment Commission oversees compliance and the Commission doesn't have enough resources or staff to ensure compliance. As a City Councilor, she would have monitoring committees in each district across the City. (Jamaica Plain has one right now.) It's important that the community has a voice.

- **Affordable Housing** — She wants to work with the state to bring the [Jim Brooks Stabilization Act](#) (also known as Just Cause Eviction) back alive. It's currently stalled at the State House. Something needs to be done about big developments as well as absentee landlords who raise people's rent.
- **Education** — She wants a hybrid or elected school committee. We need to look at the payment in lieu of taxes program for colleges. Because colleges don't currently pay taxes, colleges are supposed to pay at least 25% back into the PILOT program but \$77 million is unpaid. If they paid that, it could go towards affordable housing and education. Colleges need to give more scholarships to Boston students and should send more of their students into schools to tutor BPS kids. With so many colleges in this city, it's a disgrace that BPS is the state it's in. (And then, there's a push for more charters!)
- **On Charter Schools** — She campaigned with the Boston Teachers Union for the No on 2 ballot initiative, against lifting the cap on the number of charters in Massachusetts. She's not totally against all charters but she doesn't like that they don't take special needs students and she doesn't like the way they're funded. They shouldn't take money from public schools when they don't have the same type of curriculum or requirements. It's as if it's do as I say but not as I do. Another problem she has with the current system is that the funding follows the child, so if a child goes to a charter but comes back to the public schools, the money doesn't come back — That's insanity. There aren't parents on the board, etc. It's all about testing testing testing, which is particularly problematic with children of color. They need more than just to sit and study; they need recreation, art and music and can't just sit still in a classroom all day.

Analysis of Flint-Banks Campaign: Priscilla is a long-time grassroots activist with a deep, authentic history of fighting for equity and social justice in Boston. Our hope at Maria's List is that community-led grassroots leaders of and from the community like her run for office. She has deep roots and relationships in neighborhoods across the city that she is working to mobilize in her grassroots-driven campaign. She is trailing other challengers in the race in fundraising and needs your help to garner the financial resources to be competitive.