

Transcript: Act on Mass. Incorruptible Massachusetts episode 7

Anna Callahan:

Hello and welcome. I am here today with the great folks from act on mass. And that's Erica Uyterhoeven and Matt Miller.

E Uyterhoeven:

Hi.

Matt Miller:

Thanks so much for having us.

Anna Callahan:

Thank you for coming. So first I would love to hear from you, why Act on Mass exists. What you're, what you see your role as in Massachusetts politics.

E Uyterhoeven:

Yeah, so I think our role is, we saw a need for a way to mobilize voters to put pressure on the state legislature. We have one of the most, one of the least transparent state legislatures in the country. And so it's not as easy as just a prescriptive solution of like, go call your rep, go lobby this. But there's actually quite a convoluted system on how you can pressure power in the State House. And so we really wanted to help these grassroots groups that have been popping up up across the whole state on being really effective at holding their state reps and their senators publicly accountable.

E Uyterhoeven: [\(00:53\)](#)

And also we wanted to get something that pushed out more political reporting. Unfortunately it's really hard to find. As we know, press has been going down in this country in terms of funding and resources. But also the need for press, especially at the state legislature level, has been, is dire and we really wanted to have a clear message as to what's going on, why is it so confusing and how does the process work. And so we really wanted to be an organization that helped demystify that.

Anna Callahan:

You said that it's more complicated than just calling your state Reps. So can you give a little bit more, like an example of why it's complicated or how it doesn't work that way?

E Uyterhoeven:

Yeah, sure. So I think one way we can illustrate that is that a lot of bills get rushed out of committee for example. And you would think that, oh, there's this big public debate and then

there's a big vote and then, you know, we all have a chance to participate in that. And while there are things like hearings and lobby days where people can go out and make their voices heard, when it comes down to a bill, a lot of times it gets rushed right through. And actually we've had state reps tell us, I didn't even have enough time to read the bill before I voted on it. Right? So if the state rep and the senator don't have enough time to read the bill, how can the public possibly have enough time to react to what is happening in the State House? And so there is this need to have this rapid response for example, of how, when do I react and when can I do that? But also, which state reps should I be talking to? It's really easy for state reps say, Hey, I'm really fighting for public education. If they're not on the education committee, that's where all the education bills are right now. So it's, it's a question of how do we mobilize our resources so that we're calling the reps who are actually in that decision-making power in that moment. So those are just kind of two examples to give. Matt, if you want to add.

Matt Miller:

Yeah, no, that's exactly right. Um, the, the issue that's top of mind for me right now is say immigration policy, where three years now into the Trump administration with a host of new, really brutal racist policies that his administration has been implementing. And there are other states around the country that have passed ordinances, passed laws that make the entire state a sanctuary state. This has been a big focus for a lot of folks in Massachusetts, to pass the state communities act, which would make the state a sanctuary state. And for the last three years, basically if you wanted to know at any given day what's happening, it's something along the lines of, just wait and see. Well call your rep -- you already called your rep and they've said that they support it, but there's nothing happening.

Matt Miller:

Whereas just a few weeks ago in, in July they rushed out a child's healthcare bill with like less than 24 hours notice that it was even coming. And so there's just this really stop, stop, go mentality on Beacon Hill that makes it really hard for you as an average citizen to pay attention. Rep Hecht during the, rep Hecht from Watertown during the transparency and rules debate this past January, he said that for him, he hears more from his constituents after they read about something the legislature has done in the morning paper after it's already too late to weigh in. Because the bills move so fast sometimes after they've sat for years.

Anna Callahan:

Wow.

E Uyterhoeven:

Yeah. And I think another piece of it too is understanding the history of what's been happening. So it's really easy for reps to say, Oh, okay, I'm, we're doing the best we can. We're pushing this legislation through, oh my gosh, this is a great victory. But the reality is there's a lot of legislation that have been sitting on, essentially getting killed in committee for years and years. So for example, the healthy youth act, which would've made consent, teaching consent, mandatory sex ed, as well as having medically accurate LGBTQ-inclusive sex ed. It seems pretty basic

stuff. It has been killed for eight years running at least. Election day registration, same day registration. We have a very high student population in the state. Makes a lot of sense if you want to increase youth turnout to allow that law to be, or that bill to become law.

E Uyterhoeven:

It's been killed for over 10 years and actually most of our neighboring states have passed it for more than a few decades. So we're really behind on those things and it's easy to say, well, we're doing our best and we're trying our best. But it's like, well, if you looked at just the history of what's been going on, the question of, what can I do becomes more urgent. Right? And so, just kind of listening to that rhetoric from reps, it's just not enough. And I think the same can be said about the Public Ed bill as well. The fact of the matter was the Senate unanimously passed what is essentially, nearly equivalent to the promise act that we're seeing today. And the state legislature, the House of Representatives, provided none of the funding. So it completely broke down in the very last day of the session.

E Uyterhoeven:

And so understanding that kind of context is really critical because it's easy to say, well, we're fighting for it, we're doing it. But it's like, well, no, you've made us wait for over 10 years. And that should be, that should be part of our asks. And so our goal is to help grassroots groups one, understand that history or not history, but recent history and context, and say, Hey, no, no, no. This is not something like, we'll wait til next time. We'll wait till change, you know, change takes time. Well, we actually waited decades for this change, so we can't keep waiting anymore.

Anna Callahan:

So I want to ask you guys a little bit about state politics. As opposed to just the context of why should we work on state politics and not be focused on local politics or national politics. And of course, not to the exclusion of those, but it seems like in Massachusetts people, and really across the country, there's this big resurgence of, of electoral interest and activism at the national level and at the local level. And I think we're not seeing it at the state level as much. And so I want people who are listening to this to understand both why it's important, but also, what if we had a fantastic state legislature? What could we have in Massachusetts?

E Uyterhoeven: [\(06:45\)](#)

Yeah, that's a really great question. I think there's a general trend that all our news cycles are a hundred percent-focused on national politics. We spent two out of four years of the presidential cycle focused on a presidential election. And while not to say that electing a president is incredibly important. It is a diversion of attention to the rest of the entire system that is at play. And state politics is certainly a piece of that system that gets left behind perpetually. Right? And so I think that's where many people come into politics through like a presidential campaign. I'm certainly no exception.

Anna Callahan: [\(07:18\)](#)

Same here.

E Uyterhoeven: [\(07:18\)](#)

But I realized when I looked under the cover, oh my gosh, there's so much that happens. I mean things like education funding, what our schools look like are decided a lot at the state level. If we look at, Lowell high school gets closed every year because they don't have heating. Spanish classes at 40 degrees. Students, this is literally just environmental, basic health conditions for students to study that is completely being left behind because we don't pay attention to state politics. And so, and I think that's one big reason. It's just like the lack of attention to it in general. A second reason is that it's actually a much easier lever to pull. If you think of a US congress person, they have 700,000 or so constituents. If you organize 50 of your friends, and that's a lot of friends to put pressure on your, your state rep at your, sorry, your US Congress man or woman, they're not probably going to be able to, it's not a huge compelling case for them when they have 700,000 other constituents to care about.

E Uyterhoeven: [\(08:12\)](#)

And so it's a very tough lever to pull. And I think that's something that people have definitely acknowledged as they are doing advocacy for, let's say for Stephen Lynch or other representatives in our state that it's really hard to push him on issues. Now take the contrast of that. If you organize 50 of your friends to put pressure on your State Rep, you've actually put together a pretty sizable proportion of his, his voting block. A lot of reps get voted in with a thousand votes. Some get voted in for, usually the average is 3,000 to 4,000, but some are as low as a thousand. So if you get together 50 or a hundred people, that's literally 10% of their constituency, right? So the amount of power that grassroots groups can pull and have these tangible wins and not, these aren't just little wins. These are huge wins for things like education or healthcare, immigration. That ability to mobilize and put pressure on your reps is really empowering. And that is what the kind of power we want these grassroots groups to feel because they should be empowered, right? They should be responding to their constituents. It has to be the end of, well, I just listened to what Bob Deleo says. No, you should be listening to what your voters say. And that's something that the grassroots groups really have the power to, to pull on.

Matt Miller: [\(09:17\)](#)

One other part of your question was why not focus on local politics? And that's actually more where I started in getting involved in politics.

Anna Callahan: [\(09:25\)](#)

Me too, for those that know me.

Matt Miller: [\(09:26\)](#)

But what's, what's particularly, so there's a couple of things that are exceptional. We love, everyone loves to say that Massachusetts is exceptional. And there's a couple exceptional things about the way that our laws are written up. And one of them unfortunately is that, there's really home rule preemption on a lot of really important issues for municipalities. So if you are a

city councilor or a mayor in the state of Massachusetts and you want to legislate a new minimum wage for all businesses in your city, you can't. You can do that in other states as a mayor of a city. But here in Massachusetts, the law says that that's a state level policy. The same with almost everything to do with housing policy that would make meaningful change. Anything that is governing the landlord-tenant relationship has to go through the state, through a home rule petition where you need to get reps from as far west as Pittsfield and as far east as the Cape to sign off on what say Cambridge, Massachusetts wants to do.

Matt Miller: ([10:20](#))

So there's a real choke point, in the State House and a blocker on a lot of what you want to do locally. And so it's, it's important for us to, to engage at the state level. It's also exceptionally, the Massachusetts state legislature is one of, I think only five states across the country where there's the highest barrier to requesting a recorded vote as a legislature, as a legislator rather. And most roll calls are not required by law. So in Virginia, every bill by law has to have two roll calls. You get to see how your rep voted on the bill when it had its third reading. And then on final passage. In Massachusetts, it's only certain types of bills that actually require that final vote. And in contrast to states, there's dozens of states where you only need two state representatives or members of the lower house to request a recorded vote. In Massachusetts, you need 10% of the entire chamber to stand within five seconds to demand a vote. So there's a real, there's a real lack of transparency there that I think is matched only by Georgia and Mississippi, and funnily enough, Hawaii.

E Uytterhoeven: ([11:32](#))

I think to also answer your question about what would a, a state legislature could look like and also what is the power of the state? It's easy to say, and this is actually a narrative that we see a lot at the Massachusetts state legislature. It's like, we follow what the national is doing. Well, right now we have Trump as president. There is, there's a huge urge to pass something like the safe communities act, which would protect immigrants, especially in this moment of need. And we've also had a history of a lot of the most interesting and most transformative legislation comes from the state. Rank choice voting is an example -- that started in Maine. There's no way we could have done that nationally first, right? It had to start at the state.

E Uytterhoeven: ([12:13](#))

We could argue the same with single payer as well. Some states trying it. And again, there's some issues with Romney care, which we were the first, but again, we were a model, right? My preference is to see something like Medicare for all happen. But again, I think for that to happen at the national level, there is a strong case to be made that it could start at the state level and then show that it's a model and then bring it to the national. And that's happens to -- gay marriage is another example. I think a lot of the most important legislation has to start at the state. So when there's people saying like, oh, we gotta get, we got to turn these, these districts, from red to blue, and that's what will save us.

E Uytterhoeven: ([12:50](#))

Well, no, that's important work. Don't get me wrong. But to just only look at that, if you want to see some transformative change, looking at the states is really critical. And another piece that makes Massachusetts so exceptional is that we are one of the lowest, we have one of the lowest support for Trump in the country. So why aren't we leading on immigration policy? Right? Why can't we be a beacon for the rest of the country? Cause that will push the needle right forward to put pressure on other states to also pass such more humane and just immigration laws. Right. And so those are just examples of where we could be leading and we're not. And just an example, we have, I believe, 19 other states who've already passed election day registration. Why are we following them? Why couldn't we be the first to make the election laws even more inclusive for young people? So there's, there's a whole reason to say, well, if we organize at the local level, we can actually see transformative change at the national level and start to create that spark to move forward.

Anna Callahan: ([13:47](#))

I wanted to follow up on one thing that you said, Matt, which is talking about the home rule petitions that have to happen. And I've been more curious. I've been a little curious about this because I remembered a little while ago, around election season in 2018, reading an article that talked about all of the, the number of bills that got passed through the state. And I was like, oh, and there was a link and I clicked on the link and I read through some of the bills and they were like, approving \$32,000 for the city of Worcester to have a dog catcher and approving \$17,000 for the city of x to do whatever. And I, and I thought to myself, this is what the state is spending their time on? Are they caught up in spending, do they spend time doing all these things really should be done locally? Does that also bog them down?

Matt Miller: ([14:52](#))

So I have sat into a very large number of the informal sessions that our state house has. So they have formal sessions where all the representatives are there to vote on laws. And then there are informal sessions where basically the gimmick is that nobody doubts the presence of a quorum so that there can be four state reps who pass all the business of 160 of them. And almost every day that they do, they do these Mondays and Thursdays, usually twice a week, and usually they have to pass three bills a day, two or three bills a day about allowing state employee Martha So-and-so to get a paid sick leave bank so that she can accumulate hours that she's earned for paid, uh, paid time off. The lists all have to be an individual bill under our state constitution or the laws as they're currently written. So yes, they pass a lot of laws. Every year they file something like 7,000 pieces of legislation. Among those are probably even 500 or thousand of individual state need employees who need to have something they should be set by an HR director, not the state legislature, the General Court of the state of Massachusetts.

E Uyterhoeven: ([16:03](#))

I'll add to that too. There's another piece of this that, it's part of a piece of why a lot of things are broken. So just to give an example, we put through this thing called the voters deserve to know pledge. Very basic pledge that's asking our state reps to tell us how they vote.

Anna Callahan: (16:16)

And this is something you did recently, right?

E Uytterhoeven: (16:16)

This is very recent. Yeah, we launched this yesterday. So yeah, you're, you're the first person we're talking to about this and was really great. Yeah. But the, our pledge essentially asks state reps to tell us how they vote in committee, any state rep can tell us how they voted. It's pretty simple. And we're asking chairs of those committees to change the rules so that their committee's votes are public. As of now, only two out of the 29 do that. The other 27 do not.

E Uytterhoeven: (16:39)

For example, we do not know how the safe communities act was voted down last session. That's an example. And then finally, when, if they co-sponsor legislation, we're asking them to stand for a roll call. Essentially, if you believe a bill is important enough to co-sponsor, you should be demanding a public debate and a public vote on that bill. So pretty basic stuff, pretty boiler plate requests for these reps and it, and it really should be just some kind of rule at least, or something like that. But it's not, but it's a pledge. And the thing that's interesting about that, so some of the state reps have come back to us and said, I believe what you're doing, I support it. It's hard to argue against. But I need to get X, Y, and Z for my district. And so I cannot be sticking up to the speaker like this.

E Uytterhoeven: (17:20)

So they will not sign this pledge because they need to get these earmarks for their district. Right? And it's totally understandable if you're coming from a district that needs funding. Right? But it should not be at the expense of our democracy. And that's a part of this. Related to this home rule issue that the state reps have to fight for -- it's sort of a dog race within the State House of who can keep the speaker happiest and keep those relationships going well at the expense of us knowing what's going on, at the expense of getting actual real progressive legislation that would help the entire state out getting passed.

Anna Callahan: (17:54)

I think this leads right into the question of what is wrong with, what is, what is wrong with Massachusetts state politics? Why is it so broken?

E Uytterhoeven: (18:04)

Very good question. Um, people have asked me like, what's the history of it? And I was like, that's a really good question that we don't know entirely the whole picture of it. And we are one of the oldest legislatures in the country. And there are probably some reasons behind our US history that, our history of being a, a colonial country that probably plays into the role of, of why this is all set up this way. But I won't go into that. I think there's a number of reasons that just, our rules are just less transparent. So, just like Matt said earlier, we have the highest barrier to getting a roll call vote. So there's just, systems pieces like that that are just completely broken. And other states you just need one or two representatives to stand. We need 16. And to just

give you a sense of what that actually looks like: when we have an important bill come out and a lot of progressive and conservative reps will file amendments saying, you know, I want to change this part.

E Uyterhoeven: ([18:52](#))

I want to change that part. We believe that we should have this type of funding for low income students, or whatever that amendment could be. Essentially the reps need to also spend just as much time getting roll call for that. Rather than spending time figuring out what is the legislation or amendments we should file, they also have to spend time making sure that their other colleagues, they're going to stand with them, cause they need 16 to stand with you. And it's the same for us on the organizing end. We need to be, we should be calling reps to say, we want you to vote for this very common-sense progressive amendment. But instead we're being asked to call, can you stand for roll call? Can you just stand to say things are transparent? I mean this is absolutely crazy. Right?

E Uyterhoeven: ([19:29](#))

And then what should be happening is the former, which is that we are lobbying for, doing grassroots lobbying for issues we care about. And so I think that's one piece that makes it very broken. And as you can tell, another piece of it too is that the speaker does have an inordinate amount of power. And that's shown by the fact that the last three speakers have gotten in trouble with the law in some form or another. They're either are felonies, they'd gone to prison, they've had corruption cases, all three of them. And it's interesting, because the word on the street is Bob DiLeo is actually one of the more corrupt ones. There's this thing called Deleo dollars, which is the earmarks that I was talking about, that he uses to keep power. And so that I think is also pretty exceptional. Not all states have all three of the previous speakers go to prison, right?

Anna Callahan: ([20:12](#))

As they say, power corrupts.

E Uyterhoeven: ([20:12](#))

And power crops, right? And so it's incredibly a lot of power. So I think that's another piece of why it's broken. And I think there's another piece that's just like, if you mix those kinds of conditions with the fact that it's tough to get media coverage on state-level issues. And that's sort of a nationwide issue. I don't think there's a state that's like, oh, we're really particularly good on covering that. But because we're all focused on the national and very little on the state, it's easy to kind of get complacent and say, we're a really progressive state, super blue, we always go blue with the presidential since the 80s. I bet, I bet they're doing a good job. Right? And there's a really unfortunate way that, if you, when you're a politician you get really good at explaining that you're doing a really good job or confusing constituents.

E Uyterhoeven: ([20:56](#))

I think that's a really common tool we see in Massachusetts is saying, well the process is really complicated, you don't understand. And the thing is this is our government, we should understand. The process shouldn't be so confusing. That shouldn't be the answer to very common sense stuff. And that's partly why we made the pledge really easy to understand. It's as simple as just telling me how you vote. If there was a complicated thing, then just tell me how you vote in committee. There's nothing to stop you from that. Right? So I think that's another piece of it that we have this system that masks how, what's, what's going on, through this aura of confusion and it's a really complicated process. You don't understand the process. There's always back room deals. There shouldn't be backroom deals. This is democracy.

Matt Miller: ([21:35](#))

That's, that's exactly right. And another piece of the interlocking systems that keep, keep things broken is that we have some of the most, some of the least competitive elections in the country at the state level. So ballotpedia does a ranking of all state legislatures every year in terms of how many sitting incumbents get a primary challenge, how many sitting incumbents get a challenge from the other party. And there's a recent study done just about how those races break down in terms of competitive versus not competitive. So some people get challengers who get 2% of the vote. Other people get challenges where it's a very close election. And we're dead last for something like three of the last five years in a row that, that we've been ranked. And it, it's, it's part and parcel the rest of it. So it's hard to convince someone that they should want to run for state office if a, they don't think that Massachusetts has a problem and B, there's almost nothing that they can point to that they're sitting state rep or state senator has voted incorrectly on, because there wasn't a public vote. So they know that there are things like, the grand bargain for increasing the minimum wage last year included a provision to totally gut our time and a half law. And it made a lot of retail workers really, really mad. They lost time and a half pay on Sundays and holidays. But there's no vote. There's no way to tell which reps or senators supported or opposed that. Everyone can just sort of be like, aw, shocks, this is too bad that we lost it. But I'm really proud of what we accomplished otherwise. So it takes a lot of the energy out of it. But without those competitive elections, I think it's very easy for people to fall into, elected officials to fall into listening to say, the speaker as opposed to their real boss, which is the voters.

Speaker 1: ([23:17](#))

I think to add to that too, as a result of having the least competitive elections in the country, a lot of our, the state reps that represent districts are very far to the right of their district. That's a really common thing we see. And that's why part of, Matt and I both came from campaigns and particularly working in what we call field, which is engaging the volunteer base to knock on doors and talk to voters. And that's a really critical piece because when you have a field driven campaign as in, versus a media campaign, right? You buy a bunch of palm cards, you mail, send out mailers and do a lot of TV ads. That's the kind of, Republicans are really good at that cause they have a lot of money to spend.

Speaker 1: ([23:54](#))

Right? Or usually you have corporate money, you can spend that or developer money. But what's a real campaign is the field campaign where you talk door to door to voters. That is what actually increases turnout. And actually we came from a lot of races that massively increased turnout. Nika's race for example, increase the under 30 turnout almost seven times of what it was the previous year. And so changing the...

Anna Callahan: [\(24:19\)](#)

That's incredible. Seven times?

E Uyterhoeven: [\(24:19\)](#)

6.8. Yeah, 6.8 times the, yeah. And I think, another example is a race that Matt worked on in ward two of Somerville. It was one of the lowest, in terms of turnout by ward in Somerville, one of the lowest. It became one of the highest and it actually sustained itself in the 2018 election after the municipal election in the past. So field campaign strategies are incredibly important.

E Uyterhoeven: [\(24:43\)](#)

Going door to door and talking to voters is incredibly important, cause you expand the electorate to not be the typical, the reliable voter, right? Which tend to be white, tend to be affluent, tend to be older. If you want to have younger voters, more diverse voters, you need to do a door to door campaign. That is what actually brings voters out. That is the studies that come out from analyst institute over and over again. And so that's where, that's why we are so passionate about how do we enable these grassroots groups to build those sort of campaigns and engage their voters at that level. Because by doing that, that is what one, you're going to put pressure on your state rep, but if you actually want to see a competitive election that engages a broader electorate, that is more representative of that district, that's what it takes to win.

Anna Callahan: [\(25:24\)](#)

And it sounds like this is great advice for anybody who wants to run for State House, cause we hope it, we some listeners will in fact decide, hey, I can do this. What can you say about how difficult is it? We know what you just said, that the rate is quite low. So how hard is it to run for State House, let's say, as opposed to running for mayor or running for city council or school board?

E Uyterhoeven: [\(25:48\)](#)

Yeah, no, and I think a lot of it comes down to, on the one hand it's actually pretty easy because the message is on your side, right? Just say you'll sign this pledge and you're, most of the state reps won't, a lot of voters don't like hearing my state rep doesn't want me to know what they're up to and they don't want to be transparent.

E Uyterhoeven: [\(26:06\)](#)

And like a lot of issues are on our side, right? The fact that the safe communities act is, got killed in the last session. And saying I will fight for that. And we've seen that with a lot of elections that contrasting yourself on the issues, if you're running on the progressive issues, it's

pretty much it's, it's, the race is on your side, right? So the messaging is on your side. You don't need to contort yourself. And in that sense it's very easy. What makes it hard is that talking to a lot of voters, is a lot of work, right? And so thinking through that. But that's also one of the parts that makes this work incredibly rewarding and incredibly important. If you believe in democracy and you believe that, that the people should have a voice, that is exactly the piece that gets done. And you know, in a sense it's difficult and that it takes time. Talking door to door takes time. It's a lot of work. I'm not going to deny that, but it's really good work. And so in a sense when you say easy or hard, I see it as both easy and hard, but also incredibly rewarding.

Matt Miller: ([26:56](#))

There, there are some state reps who will run, who are sitting today, state senators sitting today who will run very strong reelection campaigns. And then what we're finding, or at least what I've seen in the data is that there's a lot of people, who actually don't run strong campaigns. There's people who were challenged just in 2018 who faced primary opponents. And it was just clear that nobody ran a good campaign in that race and nobody was talking to voters. And so turnout was very, very low. Those people were coming to the campaign I was running the field on to knock doors for that one instead. And, and there's something also, that I just wanted to say, words of encouragement to people. My state rep was first elected in 1986 and that was his last competitive election. So the voter turnout is typically in, it's typically about a thousand votes in the Democratic primary.

Matt Miller: ([27:50](#))

And he, you know, he, he's, he's at, in community meetings. He goes to the community meetings in my community, talks to people, gets to know the folks who show up. But guess what, that's the same 20 to 25 people who have the time to go to local community meetings about development or about transportation or something. And everyone I've talked to said he's untouchable, but you know, there's, this is the,

Anna Callahan: ([28:11](#))

No one's tried.

Matt Miller: ([28:11](#))

No one has tried since I was nine months old. And so, it's just, it's actually quite shocking and you know, there's a, there's been, there's been this culture in Massachusetts of people who wanna run for office being told by their local Democratic Party Chair, oh, you really should wait your turn. And Vinny has been so good to us. We don't want to cause any, any problems.

Speaker 2: ([28:34](#))

And first of all, that's terrible advice, but second of all, we're never going to have more than I think, 11 members of the black and Latino caucus out of 106 out of 200 legislators,. We're never going to have more than, what is the metric on women in the legislature?

E Uyterhoeven: ([28:50](#))

It's like one in four.

Matt Miller: ([28:52](#))

We're never gonna have a really representative body until more women, people of color, progressive's other folks decide, you know what, I'm going to, I'm going to risk it. I'm going to run against my state rep or my state senator and I'm going to highlight issues I care about. And most voters just haven't had a choice. So if you give them a choice, there'll be more open to, to considering you.

Anna Callahan: ([29:11](#))

Great. So that's, that's a big ask. Asking people to run. Let's talk about some smaller asks. What can people do today, tomorrow. What can they do to get more involved and to help you guys out with the work that you're doing.

E Uyterhoeven: ([29:25](#))

Yeah, I think the biggest thing is organizing in your community, and especially organizing in your community to engage with your state rep and make clear demands. And that's actually why we put together this pledge. A lot of times, especially in advocacy, it says, well, we've got to fight to get these cosponsors. And that's really important. But it isn't saying that the promise act, which has over a hundred co-sponsors, and not to mention the education amendment that came at the end of the session last year, that would've helped fund with low income, had over a hundred co-sponsors, never got to see a public vote.

E Uyterhoeven: ([29:56](#))

So asking people to co-sponsor is important work. Right? It helps build up that this bill is important, but it's not enough. And it doesn't actually hold your state rep accountable. Because it's easy to say, a lot of state reps do say, I'm cosponsoring the bill because that's the messaging one. And I'm done. I pushed my button and I'm done. Exactly. And actually even the more heinous story is that they will say, I cosponsor and then they go to speaker and say, please do not make me vote on this bill. I do not want to take a vote.

Anna Callahan: ([30:21](#))

It's really hard to even know whether that's, happening because it's all....

E Uyterhoeven: ([30:22](#))

Yeah. And we don't know who's doing that cause it's all behind closed doors. And so unfortunately co-sponsoring, while it is a signal, it is not a, it's not a sufficient signal. And this pledge is something that is verifiable. We know if they're actually doing it. And actually act on mass will be in the the gallery when they are taking a vote. So we'll know who stands for roll call. Right. And people know if they're, the rep told us how they vote. Rep Sabadosa, Rep Robinson both have on their website how they voted. It's pretty simple. And some people may not have a website, but if you just tell us how we vote, we'll put it up there. So it's very verifiable. It's a very simple ask. And that's part of why we put that pledge together was to give grassroots

group something that they can verify and demand from their state rep that is actually tangible change. Not something like "I'm fighting for education." What does that mean?

Anna Callahan: [\(31:09\)](#)

So you are trying to, you're talking about grassroots groups a lot, so maybe joining a grassroots group is a good thing to do. But I'm guessing that even individual people, if they sign up at your website, that you are coordinating things so that they're going to be reaching out to the right people at the right time before the bill has passed. Which even though that window might be only 24 hours.

E Uyterhoeven: [\(31:31\)](#)

Yeah, definitely signing up on our website will put us on a list that we will let you know when, for example, if the public education bill comes out of committee, we'll have 24 hours to respond. So you will get a phone call from us in that 24 hours to say, please vote for the promise act. We need fully funded public education. And so having your, call your state Rep. Because especially in that moment it will go to the floor. So every state rep actually has a choice in that moment. And then we'll be tracking that. So definitely like us on Facebook join our mailing list because we will keep you updated on what is happening.

Anna Callahan: [\(32:05\)](#)

So for example, people who have liked you and whatever that shows support for what you're doing and then maybe you'll have more influence with the state reps.

Matt Miller: [\(32:12\)](#)

The website is actonmass.org and you can see the pledge at actonmass.org/pledge.

E Uyterhoeven: [\(32:21\)](#)

And you can also see results of other previous votes. This past session we had a pretty unprecedented vote happen. There were these things called the transparency amendments. Again, very common sense stuff. One of them was tell us how you vote in committee. And we actually, what made it unprecedented was that this was a vote that the speaker did not want to have recorded. And it got recorded anyway because there were enough progressive reps who stood for roll call and made sure it got recorded.

E Uyterhoeven: [\(32:48\)](#)

And that's actually very new. We did not have enough state reps who were willing to do that in the past. We had a small contingent of progressive state reps who believed that things should be done differently. But this is actually the first session we've had enough of a groundswell to push ourselves over that 16 mark. And so those transparency amendment votes are also on our website. That's really critical. And you'll see it's a shocking number of Democrats did not vote for something like make committee votes public. But that's something that you can see our reporting on what's going on in the State House and they haven't done a whole lot. There's just been a few votes, but these are the votes that you can see on our website. Yeah.

Anna Callahan: [\(33:24\)](#)

Any final thoughts about state politics, about how people can get involved, about Act on Mass?

E Uyterhoeven: [\(33:32\)](#)

I think the most important thing is that democracy is work. It's really good work. Please join a grassroots group.

Anna Callahan: [\(34:12\)](#)

And joining a grassroots group makes it fun, too. Some of my closest friends are the people that I work with in democracy related stuff.

E Uyterhoeven: [\(34:12\)](#)

Exactly. And if there isn't a grassroots group in your area, start one. We're happy to help support that. There are a lot of resources to help supporting building these groups. And the reason why I say that is, we've had also state reps directly tell us I would sign the pledge except no one in my district cares. And that's a huge problem, right? And we need in every single district voters and constituents who really care about holding their state reps accountable. We can't stay complacent saying, well, they're doing the best they can.

E Uyterhoeven: [\(34:49\)](#)

That's a narrative that doesn't work anymore. And if anything, I don't believe that with any of the state reps, no one should believe in, hey, I worked tooth and nail to get Nika elected, I worked tooth and nail to get many other candidates elected. I do not say, oh, they're doing good enough, I can stop paying attention now. That is not how democracy works. And that is not how power works. If you want to challenge power, you need to be organizing and holding your reps accountable. Reps respond to incentives. And right now the biggest incentive is Bob Deleo. Their biggest incentive should be their voters. But that won't happen if we're organized and we're saying, oh no, they're doing the best they can. I can turn off the TV now. I can stop paying attention. And so there is a need to continue to do that with anyone. There's no, there's no district where you can say, oh my rep is so progressive, don't even bother calling me. That's not the case. They do need to hear it from their voters, and that's actually something too. They can go to leadership and say, look, I've gotten 50 calls from my voters, I have to vote this way. I'm sorry. And that gives them cover. And that's something they've asked for as well to us saying we need to have, and we need to hear from our district. So again, no complacency, join grassroots groups and fight for them.

Matt Miller: [\(35:54\)](#)

You will be surprised how much. So I spent most of my political engaged life just getting mad on Facebook or reading news articles. And you'll be amazed how much better you feel if you actually show up at a meeting, try to meet your neighbors, argue and fight for issues you care about. It's actually really empowering because a lot of our democracy institutions have kind of withered away, but they're still there. And if you show up to city council, they have to listen to

you talk, you show up to a State House hearing, they have to listen to you talk. If you join together and decide to organize with your neighbors for some other issue, it's really important stuff. So please do get involved. You can sign up on our website, actonmass.org, but any group is really good in Massachusetts.

Speaker 1: ([36:37](#))

Thank you both so much for today's interview, which was really informative as well as all of the work you do.

E Uyterhoeven: ([36:44](#))

Thank you for having us.

Matt Miller: ([36:44](#))

Thanks for having us.