

Statement on Question 7

October 11, 2026

In the upcoming general election, Providence voters will vote on a range of [state and municipal ballot initiatives](#), including Question 7, which states: “Shall ‘an [ordinance](#) divesting from foreign countries conducting severe violations of human rights such as ethnic cleansing, apartheid, illegal military occupation or genocide’ be approved?” **I am planning to vote no due to the fiscal harm that would likely result.**

Question 7 has made me think deeply about my priorities and values. While the ordinance does not explicitly refer to Israel, we know that Israel is the most prominent current example of these human rights violations. During this most recent phase of struggle and multinational wrongs that include the terror and devastation of Hamas’ October 7, 2023 attacks on Israel, Israel’s current leadership is inflicting horrific sustained destruction on Palestinians, using weapons provided by the United States and funded by our tax dollars. I’m Jewish and have deep family ties to Israel. I abhor what is happening in and around Israel and along with many of you, attempt to temper my sadness with the fervent hope that the people of that region—all of the people—have a peaceful and autonomous future. But I do not believe that voting yes on Question 7 can produce that future.

If this ordinance came before the City Council, I would be obligated to vote no given my duty as a City Councilor to Providence’s fiscal health. Our pension investments are currently a bit less than one-third funded. This is an alarming financial position, and while the city has made some improvement in the last 15 years, we have much more ground to make up to meet our pension commitments that were ignored for too long.

Providence’s unfunded accrued liability is 1.3 billion dollars. Currently, to keep up with this debt, one in every four of our tax dollars go toward pension obligations, and we will need to find ways to increase spending on these obligations for years to come. The City’s actuarially required contribution has more than doubled in the last 15 years, and

will continue increasing at five percent annually. City revenues cannot reasonably be expected to increase at anything close to that pace. During the current fiscal year, FY27, Providence is making a \$118 million dollar contribution, which is more than 18 percent of our \$640 million budget. Each year, this contribution will increase, eventually to \$224 million per year by 2040, when the system is required to reach full funding per our current model.

We inherited a complex fiscal situation for which we urgently need solutions, and I am committed to working with the incoming Mayoral administration, my fellow Councilors, and others to find those solutions. For now, let's return to Question 7.

The demands of Providence's underfunded pension systems mean that we must maximize returns on our investments in order to make the most of what we do have. Recent administrations have maintained consistent payments to the pension fund and pursued a strategy that avoids short-term holdings and retains low-cost management which has guided us to more predictable results.

Question 7 could make the financial threat of our pension situation worse. In order to identify and disinvest from companies deemed complicit, we would need to abandon our current approach, sell many of our long-held positions in well-performing funds, and retain new managers with skills to meet the ordinance's requirements. We'd need to spend more time in compliance while very likely receiving worse results. As a result, we will likely increase the proportion of our tax dollars required to meet pension obligations. We need those dollars, in an already tight budget, to fund our schools, roads, housing, and so much more.

I agree with the spirit of Question 7. I do not want my tax dollars to support any country that conducts "severe violations of human rights such as ethnic cleansing, apartheid, illegal military occupation or genocide." But my desire to meet that standard does not outweigh my obligation to the people of Providence now and in the future.

The ordinance includes the stipulation that it “shall not apply when application would result in a violation of the City’s fiduciary responsibilities to its pensioners and beneficiaries.” This stipulation acknowledges that we cannot allow fiscal harm through divestment, and in discussions about the ordinance, some people have pointed to these words as effectively neutralizing the ordinance’s requirement to divest. That may be so—but if it is impracticable and unenforceable, is it good policy?

I want to make it clear that my position on Question 7 does not indicate a lack of compassion for any people whose lives and lands have been devastated by another nation’s aggression. It does, however, indicate that I believe that the fragile Providence municipal pension fund is not the appropriate venue in which to enact those values.

Here are a few resources about the history and status of Providence’s pension obligations:

[2022 Providence Pension Working Group Report](#)

[League of Women Voters of Providence Providence Special Referendum on Pension Obligation Bonds June 7, 2022 - Research](#)

[Boston Globe February 26, 2026: Providence pension system reaches a milestone, with a long road ahead](#)

[Providence Eye September 2, 2026: “The Status Quo is Not a Solution”: A New Proposal for the Providence Pension Crisis](#)