

A glimpse at some officials of color, immigrant descent, and/or internal migration (“transplants”) from the North, South, Metro Boston, & Merrimack regions who served or were elected between 2015 and 2022-

Observing and reading about the 2023 Massachusetts municipal elections prompted me to revisit notes I originally wrote throughout the month of January 2020 after attending two inaugural ceremonies and reading about elected officials in several North of Boston cities and towns. As an immigrant educator and lay minister, a campaign volunteer since 1992, a former council candidate myself who has been living in Boston’s Metro North since 1973, I found it important for historical purposes to write down my January 2020 thoughts. While writing, other elected officials of immigrant descent from Metro Boston and Merrimack Valley came to mind. So I researched their work and backgrounds and added them to the compiled list.

It was historically remarkable to see on January 6, 2020 inaugural night and to read in the papers thereafter about immigrants of color and children of immigrants taking oath of office. From living in the same streets, to their parents being members of the same church community, to living in immigrant enclave complexes where my siblings, relatives, and I had lived, to receiving services in community agencies as new immigrants, to serving immigrants as part of their day time work, this new generation of leaders from several Metro North cities and towns who were sworn-in Monday 6 January, 2020 were not strangers to me at all. The only two elected officials from Malden, Everett, Cambridge, Somerville and Methuen I didn’t know prior to Monday January 6, 2020 was Jimmy Tri Le, who was sworn-in as Everett’s Ward 4 Councilor and Quinton Y. Zondervan, second term Cambridge City Councilor.

Here are some municipal officials of immigrant descent from several towns in the North of Boston region elected or re-elected in 2019:

Joseph Gray, Malden School Committee - Ward 6; first elected in November 2019; re-elected in 2021; running unopposed in 2023; native of Trinidad/Tobago, mother from the West Indies Island of Dominica;

Gerly Adrien, elected Everett City Councilor—at-Large on November 2019 - Ran for Mayor in 2021, but lost in the September 2021 primary elections; of Haitian parents;

Stephanie Martins, Everett Councilor - Ward 2 elected in November 2019, native of Brazil,

Jimmy Tri Le, Everett City Councilor - Ward 4, first elected in November 2019; raised in California; of Vietnamese parents;

Marcony Almeida Barros, Everett School Committee Member- Ward 5 originally appointed in January 2018 by City Council and School Committee bodies; elected November 2019; Native of Brazil;

Wilfred N. Mbah, first elected Somerville City Councilor- at-Large in 2017, re-elected in November 2019 - Ran for Mayor in 2021, won the top ticket in a 4-way primary race with his voters being mostly younger urban Caucasian professionals. However, Mr.Mbah lost the November 2021 general mayoral elections;but he was sworn in January 2024 as city council at large; native of Cameron, migrated to Boston/ Somerville area around 2010 after completing his studies in Switzerland.

Eunice Delice Zeigler, East District Councilor of Methuen; First elected in 2017, re-elected on November 2019, ran for a newly redrawn First Essex State Senate district, lost a 3-way primary race on September 2022 – of Haitian immigrant parents;

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Sumbul Siddiqui, Mayor of Cambridge; elected Mayor by fellow City Council members in 2020; first elected to Cambridge Council in 2018; Native of Pakistan;

Quinton Y. Zondervan, Cambridge City Councilor, first took office in 2018, will not seek re-election in 2023; Native of Suriname

Vivian Nguyen, Everett Ward 5 Councilor. Ms. Nguyen won her seat on November 2021 while a university student in her senior year. She significantly defeated by 716 or 57.9 % of the votes established incumbent Councilor Rosa DiFlorio who received 444 or 35.84% of the ballots. Councilor Nguyen is of Vietnamese immigrant parents.

Carlos Vidal – Waltham Councilor-at-Large re-elected in November 2017, 2019, 2021, first elected in 2015; Emigrated from Peru -

Mehreen Butt, Wakefield Town Councilor, originally elected to the formerly called “Board of Selectman” on April 2017, re-elected in June 2020, elected chair of the Council Board by fellow council members on June 2022 - of Pakistani parents;

Manny Cruz, Massachusetts State Representative for the 7th Essex District (Salem); elected in 2022 & member of the Salem School Committee since 2017; re-elected in 2019; Afro-Latino of Dominican Republic descent;

In the context of history, it should be mentioned that **Haitian-American Emmanuel Marsh** who served in Malden District 2 as a member of the School Committee in 2015-2017 lost re-election in 2017. **Sharline Nabulime, Ugandan- American,** elected Councilor for District 6 of the City of Waltham in a special election in 2018; lost her re-election bid on November 2019.

Some elected officials of immigrant descent from other cities and towns in the Boston area

Jean Senat Fleury, Town Meeting Member of Brookline, MA originally nominated in 2020 by a caucus to replace a member; first elected in May 2021- Re-elected in May 2022; Native of Haiti;

Judith García, Massachusetts State Representative of 11th Suffolk, representing Ward 2 **Precincts 1 and 2A, Everett** in Middlesex county **and Chelsea** in Suffolk County; elected State Rep in November 2022; first elected Chelsea City Council in 2015 and still in the seat; of Honduran immigrant mother;

Current and former Haitian-Americans elected officials from South of Boston region, referred to as “South Shore”

Natacha Clerger, Randolph Town Councilor-at-Large; first elected in 2017; Migrated from Haiti to South Florida in 2005 and to the Boston area couple years later;

Vedna Lacombe-Heywood, Plymouth School Committee Member, first elected in May 2018, re-elected May 2021; lost bid for Town Select Board in May 2023; Native of Haiti, had lived in Coral Springs, Florida prior relocating to Massachusetts;

Jean Bradley Deroncourt, elected Brockton's Councilor-at-Large in November 2017; lost mayoral bid in 2019 and for city councilor-at-large in 2021, running again in 2023; Migrated from Haiti in 2010;

From the Merrimack Valley Region (further North of Boston, closer to the New Hampshire border)

Sokhary Chau, Mayor, Lowell, Massachusetts - First Elected City Councilor of Lowell in 2019 **re-elected in November 2021**; elected Mayor unanimously on January 3, 2022 by all 11 Lowell City Council members; First Mayor of color in the City of Lowell, first Cambodian - American Mayor in the United States; Native of Cambodia;

Paul Ratha Yem, District 7 Lowell City Councilor; elected in 2021; moved to Boston for job offer in 1981; Native of Cambodia;

Tram Nguyen (Trâm Nguyễn), Massachusetts State Representative of the 18th Essex District representing the towns of Andover, Boxford, North Andover, and Tewksbury; First elected in November 2018; First Vietnamese-American woman in elected office in Massachusetts; Native of Vietnam;

Pavel M. Payano, Massachusetts State Senator 1st Essex District; elected on November 8, 2022 to the newly redrawn senatorial district that encompasses Methuen, Lawrence, and parts of Haverhill; member of the Lawrence City Council from 2018 to 2022. Prior to being elected to the Council in 2017, Mr. Payano was appointed to the Lawrence School Committee in 2011 and served as Vice-Chair of the School Committee from 2012 to 2014; Native of Dominican Republic;

Francisco E. Paulino, Massachusetts State Representative - 16th Essex which is comprised of parts of Lawrence and Methuen; Elected in November 2022; **Lawrence** School Committee Member from 2016 to 2018; Native of Santiago, Dominican Republic;

Andres "Andy" X. Vargas, Massachusetts State Representative for 3rd Essex District, which comprises of Haverhill and Georgetown; First elected in a special election to the House of Representatives in 2017; re-elected unopposed in 2018, 2020 and 2022; of immigrant parents from the Dominican Republic;

Estela A. Reyes, Massachusetts State Representative for 4th Essex District, comprised of Methuen and Lawrence; re-elected in November 2022; first elected Lawrence City Council in 2012; Native of Dominican Republic;

Rady Mom, Massachusetts State Representative for 18th Middlesex district since 2015- Representing part of Lowell; Native of Cambodia;

Juana Matias, Appointed in 2022 by President Biden as New England regional administrator for HUD (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development); Massachusetts State Representative for 16th Essex district from 2017 to 2019; 16th Essex district is part of Lawrence; First Latina immigrant elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives on November 2016; In September 2018, lost bid for Massachusetts Third Congressional District seat in a 10 way primary Democratic race; Native of Dominican Republic;

From out-of-state:

Though most of these aforementioned officials of immigrant descent are among the first in their role, out of state elected officials of color had also made significant political gains in Massachusetts.

Mayor Michelle Wu, in 2021 was first female, first person of color elected **Mayor of Boston**; was first elected Boston City Council in 2014 - Born in Chicago, daughter of Taiwanese immigrant;

Lydia Edwards, First Suffolk and Middlesex Massachusetts State Senator; elected in January 2022 through a special election where primaries were held on December 2021; Represented First district (East Boston) at the Boston City Council from 2018 to April 2022.

Cities and towns from Senator Edwards' senatorial district are: East Boston, parts of Winthrop, parts of Cambridge, and Revere. Senator Edwards was born in Florida, lived all over the world wherever her military mother was stationed; studied at Fordham University in New York, got her JD law degree at American University in DC, and settled in Boston.

Ayanna Pressley, Congresswoman for Massachusetts District 7, first elected on November 2018. The 7th Congressional district includes the northern three quarters of Boston (Mattapan, Dorchester, Roxbury, Hyde Park, Roslindale), parts of Milton, most of Cambridge, Everett, Somerville, Chelsea, and Randolph; US Rep. Pressley served as Boston City Council Member- at-Large from 2010 to 2019. The first woman of color elected to the Boston city council, was born in Cincinnati, Ohio and lived in Chicago before moving to Boston.

Manikka L. Bowman, Cambridge School Committee Member 2017 to 2021, first elected in 2017, didn't seek reelection in 2021. Raised in Lake Charles, Louisiana, moved to Cambridge (a North of Boston city) in 2006 after studying Divinity and Urban Policy in Georgia.

Natacha Clerger, Randolph Town Councilor-at-Large; first elected on November 2017; Migrated from Haiti to Broward/Dade county area, Florida in 2005 and to the Boston area couple years later;

Vedna Lacombe-Heywood, Plymouth School Committee Member, first elected May 2018, re-elected May 2021; lost bid for Town Select Board in May 2023; Native of Haiti, had lived in Coral Springs, Florida prior relocating to Massachusetts;

Some City of Boston Elected Officials of Immigrant Descent

Mayor Michelle Wu, in 2021 was first female, first person of color elected Mayor of Boston, first elected Boston City Council in 2014; Born in Chicago, daughter of Taiwanese immigrant;

Rutzee Louisjeune, Boston Councilor-at-Large - elected November 2022, first Boston Councilor of Haitian descent; Born in Boston of Haitian immigrant parents;

Julia Mejia, Boston City Council--at-large; re-elected in November 2021; first immigrant elected Boston City Council; started first term on January 2020, won the November 2019 by one vote on a three-day recount over Alejandra St. Guillen, 22,491 votes and Mejia 22,492 votes; Native of Dominican Republic;

Kendra Lara (Hicks), Boston City Councilor, District 6 - Elected in November 2021 as Kendra Hicks; Born in the Bronx (in Dominican Republic based on Wikipedia); family relocated to Jamaica Plain in 1990 when she was a child; along with Ricardo Arroyo, Councilor Kendra Lara lost in the September 2023 preliminaries. Her parents are from the Dominican Republic.

Tania Fernandes Anderson, Boston City Council for the 7th district (Roxbury, Dorchester, Fenway, and part of the South End); first elected in November 2021, became US citizens in 2019; Native of Cape Verde;

Though this paper is about recent elected officials of immigrant descent in certain Massachusetts geographical areas, as a Haitian-American observing US politics, it's fitted to make note of the first US Congresswoman from the Democratic party, of Haitian descent - US Rep Cherfilus-McCormick, from Florida, the state with the largest Haitian population in the country.

Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, first elected Congresswoman for Florida's 20th district through a special election on August 2022. Won 72% of the votes in November 2022. Florida's 20th congressional district comprises parts of Broward and of southeastern Palm Beach Counties. US Rep. Cherfilus-McCormick reportedly put in \$6million of her own funds for the 20th Florida's Congressional seat; born in New York of Haitian immigrant parents.

Three Haitian-American candidates had done well in the Massachusetts September 2023 Preliminary elections. They are:

- **Jean Bradley Derenoncourt**, candidate for City Councilor- at- large in Brockton topped the ticket with 2,156 votes – Moving on for the November general elections.
- **Fred Fontaine** came second place in Brockton's Mayoral election. With 1,114 votes, candidate Fontaine is facing up incumbent Mayor Robert F. Sullivan in November 2023.
- **Guerline Alcy (Jaboin)** with 909 votes advances for one of the 5 City Councilor–at-Large seats in Everett, Massachusetts. - Compiled by Nekita Lamour originally January 2020 – Revised July through September 2023

From the above list, regarding elected officials of immigrant backgrounds in the North of Boston area: On the November 7, 2023 general elections, Joseph Gray, Malden Ward 6 School Committee ran unopposed. Marcony Almeida Barros, Ward 5 Everett School Committee Member ran unopposed as well. Stephanie Martins, Ward 2 Everett Councilor was re-elected. Wilfred (Will) N.Mbah came back, won 3rd place with 11,033 votes as Somerville City Council-at-Large. **Note - There were 13,931 blanks in that Somerville at large voting. The other winners received 11, 283; 11,933 and 10,853 votes respectively. Some commentators wrote "blank" was the winner of that race. Jimmy Tri Le of Everett lost to Ward 4 City Council seat to Holy Garcia. Vivian Nguyen, Everett, lost Ward 5 City Council seat to Robert Van Campen.**

Haitian-Americans who won and lost in Massachusetts November 7, 2023 General Elections

Rutzee Louisjeune, Boston Councilor-at-Large was reelected – Elected Boston City Council President on January 2024;

Natacha Clerger, Randolph - lost her Town Councilor-at-Large seat by 7 votes (1,042)

Fred Fontaine - with his 3,197 votes lost his bid for Brockton's mayor.

Guelince Semerzier - with 583 lost his bid for one of Randolph Town Councilor-at-Large seats.

Yves Lamitie - 117 votes Town Meeting Member Saugus Precint 2. Could come back because two members won with 138 votes.

Vedna Lacombe-Heywood, Plymouth School Committee Member- Municipal elections are held in May in Plymouth.

Jean Senat Fleury, Town Meeting Member of Brookline- Municipal elections are held in May in Brookline.

Eunice Delice Zeigler, East District Councilor of Methuen- Had reached her 3-two-year term limits; served 6 years all together and can not run this year. Ms. Ziegler will have to wait two years if she wants to run for the same seat. - Running for Governor's Council in 2024

Addendum November 30, 2023 & January 2024 by Nekita Lamour, M.Ed., MTS