

Massachusetts Office of Campaign and Political Finance Study

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Ballot question committees report \$60.3 million in expenditures, the highest total ever

Four ballot question committees spent \$60.3 million on two propositions in 2020, an overall spending record, according to an OCPF review of ballot question fundraising and spending. Prior to 2020, the spending record for all ballot question committees during a two-year cycle was \$57.5 million, set in 2016 when four questions were on the ballot.

Two other records were broken in 2020.

The \$50.3 million spending total for Question 1, concerning motor vehicle data, broke the record for a single question. The previous record for a single question was \$41.2 million, set in 2016 for a question concerning charter schools.

The Coalition for Safe and Secure Data, which opposed Question 1 in 2020, broke the spending record for a single committee, reporting \$26.4 million in expenditures. The previous record of \$24.7 million was set in 2018 by the Coalition to Protect Patient Safety concerning patient-to-nurse limits.

OCPF's review of ballot question activity covered fundraising and spending in 2019-20 for two questions that appeared on the 2020 statewide ballot:

Question 1: Motor vehicle mechanical data (passed)

Question 2: Ranked-choice voting (failed)

The figures in this study are based on reports filed by committees covering activity through Dec. 31, 2020, and are subject to change due to any subsequent corrections, deletions or additions made as a result of any review conducted by OCPF or amendments filed by committees.

In addition to the fundraising and spending reported by ballot question committees, businesses and other entities reported a total of \$29,444 in spending that was [independent](#) of any ballot question committee.

Reports filed by each of the committees may be found on OCPF's website at www.ocpf.us.

A breakdown of activity for each question follows.

Campaign Finance Activity for the 2020 Statewide Ballot Questions

Totals include receipts and expenditures by each ballot question committee organized with OCPF for 2019 and 2020. In most instances, the committee organized during 2019.

Question 1: Motor vehicle mechanical data — Passed

Committee	Receipts	Expenditures	In-Kind Contributions	Outstanding Liabilities
	<i>Support</i>			
Massachusetts Right to Repair Committee	\$24,868,976	\$23,895,860	\$40,602	--
Totals in favor	\$24,868,976	\$23,895,860	\$40,602	--
	<i>Oppose</i>			
Coalition for Safe and Secure Data	\$26,423,004	\$26,420,504	\$133,318	--
Totals in opposition	\$26,423,004	\$26,420,504	\$133,318	
Question 1 Totals	\$51,291,980	\$50,316,364	\$173,920	--

Vote Count

Yes: 2,599,182 (spent per-vote \$9.19)

No: 867,674 (spent per-vote \$30.45)

Question 2: Ranked-choice voting — Failed

Committee	Receipts	Expenditures	In-Kind Contributions	Outstanding Liabilities
	<i>Support</i>			
Ranked Choice Voting 2020 Committee	\$10,011,212	\$10,011,212	\$188,303	--
<i>Totals in favor</i>	\$10,011,212	\$10,011,212	\$188,303	--
	<i>Oppose</i>			
No Ranked Choice Voting Committee	\$8,476	\$8,476	\$31	--
<i>Totals in opposition</i>	\$8,476	\$8,476	\$31	--
<i>Question 2 Totals</i>	\$10,019,688	\$10,019,688	\$188,334	--

Vote Count

Yes: 1,549,919 (spent per-vote \$6.46)

No: 1,877,447 (spent per-vote: less than 1 cent)

Note: This study includes activity for 2019 and 2020.

Statewide Ballot Question Expenditures

1988 – 2020

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of Questions</i>	<i>Number of Committees</i>	<i>Total spent</i>
1988	4	18	\$13,317,952
1990	6	20	\$5,661,062
1992	4	8	\$16,139,661
1994	9	23	\$11,155,835
1996	1	3	\$1,210,777
1998	3	9	\$9,999,283
2000	8	16	\$15,340,199
2002	3	6	\$2,332,880
2006	3	6	\$15,320,327
2008	3	7	\$11,516,215
2010	3	9	\$9,098,307
2012	3	13	\$9,554,909
2014	4	13	\$30,193,266
2016	4	15	\$57,477,775
2018	3	7	\$42,640,899
2020	2	4	\$60,336,052

Note: There were no questions on the statewide ballot in 2004.