

# In Their Own Words: Alana DiMario (D), Senate District 36

We talked to many of the local candidates running for public office in the upcoming 2020 election. We asked each of them the same set of questions, with the promise to print their answers only lightly edited for clarity. The following answers are from **Alana DiMario** (D), running against **Doreen Costa** (R), for RI Senate District 36.

**Motif:** What are, in order, your top three priorities or issues if elected?

**Alana DiMario:** With the disclaimer that priorities will need to remain flexible given the changing situation due to COVID-19 and federal administration actions:

1. Pass the Act on Climate Bill (passed the Senate but not the House this session) to implement measurable and actionable benchmarks for different sectors to reach the goal of net-zero emissions in Rhode Island by 2050. As we get through and recover from the COVID-19 crisis, we can't lose sight of the realities of climate change and what we need to do to combat it, including moving toward a new sustainable energy infrastructure built and maintained by Rhode Island workers.
2. Create educational and economic opportunity by continuing to expand Paid Family Leave policies, increasing income caps for childcare assistance, expanding public Pre-K seats statewide, expanding trade educational access, fixing and funding our schools equitably, and increasing the minimum wage.
3. Take common sense approaches to increasing revenue sources, such as following the lead of many other states in fully legalizing and taxing marijuana (which would also decrease incarceration expenditures) and considering a marginal tax rate increase on Rhode Island's top earners.

**Motif:** After the election, the Supreme Court is scheduled to hear a case with ramifications that could eliminate the Affordable Care Act, potentially reducing the high insured rate in Rhode Island. In a country without ACA protections, what should healthcare for Rhode Islanders look like?

**AD:** In a country without ACA protections, healthcare for Rhode Islanders can and should look like a state WITH ACA protections. We have the power to protect essential covered services for Rhode Islanders, such as emergency services, hospitalization, maternity and newborn care, mental health and substance abuse treatment, prescription drugs and pediatric services, among other benefits. This

legislation has already been introduced by Senator Josh Miller in previous sessions, and if the protections of the ACA are removed at the federal level, we should do all we can to ensure that the healthcare access of Rhode Islanders is preserved.

**Motif:** Do you think police departments are overfunded, and if so, how would you reallocate those resources?

**AD:** The issue at hand is really whether we are accomplishing our public safety goals to make our communities healthy and safe, and working backwards if not to address the root causes of crime. We cannot continue to expect police officers to be mental health counselors, social workers, housing advocates and substitute parents, among other roles. Unlimited amounts of spending on police would not ever effectively meet those needs. We need to allocate more resources to addressing poverty, specifically food and housing insecurity, in our communities, as we know this has a positive impact not only on crime rates but on *people*. We also need to allocate more resources to integrate social services and mental health programs both in schools and also in our communities to help our vulnerable friends and neighbors.

**Motif:** Should school funds be pooled and redistributed on a weighted scale to address statewide equity issues, or should districts continue to fund their own community schools? Are there school districts that should be combined?

**AD:** The school funding formula needs to be changed. Every child in Rhode Island should be able to receive a world-class education, regardless of the town they live in. I think that could be accomplished via a statewide funding formula, or by regionalizing schools to more equitably address needs. The data from other states about changing funding formulas does not definitively show what approach leads to the best outcomes, but information taken from those changes elsewhere can help inform what direction we need to go in. The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted that we need to start moving forward with the school infrastructure improvement projects as soon as possible, targeting the facilities that are in the worst shape first. Our kids should walk into school buildings that show their communities value them and their education.

**Motif:** COVID most harshly impacted a lot of core industries in Rhode Island (eg, hospitality, restaurants, arts/entertainment). What can elected officials do to revitalize these industries and improve the lives of our poorest residents?

**AD:** Maximizing the distribution of CARES funding that is already allocated toward small businesses is the first step; this can help businesses adapt if possible and cover some overhead costs to offset their lost revenue. In addition, we need to ensure that housing and food stability, along with access to

healthcare, is maintained for workers in these hardest-hit industries. Federal money must be directed toward programs to help displaced workers with these essential needs as well as toward business owners. Revitalizing these industries is dependent on getting COVID19 under control. The sooner we can widely distribute a proven vaccine, the sooner we can safely reopen fully. I would support using a portion of future federal funds to invest in offsetting advertising and reopening costs.

**Motif:** Climate change is a very real threat in Rhode Island — we are in close proximity to the ocean and broke temperature and drought records this year. If elected, what steps would you take to protect the environment?

**AD:** In Rhode Island we can do our part for the future by investing in a new renewable energy infrastructure with statewide standards for smart siting and breaking our reliance on fossil fuel energy imported from outside of the state. In addition, we can take action now to mitigate the effects of climate change such as rising sea levels and coastal flooding. We need a statewide initiative in coastal communities and other areas vulnerable to flooding to maintain storm drains and identify places to mitigate flooding risks through additional drainage and other proactive measures. Finally, we need to protect our drinking water supply by utilizing more green infrastructure installations to reduce the water pollution caused by stormwater runoff.