



2026 Candidate Survey

Candidate Name: Kirstan Watson

Office Running For: State House

District: 140

Campaign Website: kirstanwatson.org

Please describe your personal and professional experience with nonprofit organizations

My experience with nonprofits has been primarily through community service, advocacy, and partnerships rather than as a nonprofit employee. As a small-business owner and school board member, I have seen how often nonprofits step into spaces where government or the private sector cannot meet a community need alone.

I have worked alongside mission-driven organizations on issues ranging from education and healthcare access to labor, energy, and housing—including current work with the Maine Labor Climate Council around improving energy efficiency and heating systems for manufactured-home residents. I have also supported organizations such as Planned Parenthood of Northern New England and have seen firsthand the importance of nonprofit organizations in providing services, advocacy, expertise, and connections that strengthen our communities.

Those experiences have reinforced my belief that nonprofits should not be treated simply as outside service providers. They are subject-matter experts and essential partners in identifying problems, reaching people government may struggle to reach, and developing solutions that work on the ground.

Please describe your top three policy goals.

MANP does not endorse candidates or promote or endorse any political party. MANP's goal is to educate nonprofits and legal and effective advocacy and election season activity, to educate candidates about the impact and potential of the nonprofit sector, and to educate voters by soliciting information directly from candidates on how they would strengthen and partner with the sector if elected.



1. Build an economy that working people can afford to participate in. Affordability isn't just about costs. Tax obligations should be measured by the burden they place on households, rather than the number of dollars paid in and those with far greater resources can contribute more without sacrificing their basic needs. Our tax system and financial policies need to accurately reflect the pressure they place on seniors, local businesses, small farms, and working families whose wages don't keep pace with rising costs.

Because tax dollars aren't collected in Augusta, burned in a furnace, and gone forever, rethinking public spending is key to efficiency. Used wisely, those dollars keep circulating through our economy—supporting jobs and businesses, bringing federal dollars into Maine, and preventing greater costs down the line. In a slowing economy, \$1 in SNAP benefits can generate about \$1.54 in GDP; every \$1 Maine spends on regular MaineCare brings in roughly \$1.54 in federal funding; and every public \$1 invested in Maine's community college system is estimated to return \$2.70 to taxpayers and \$9.10 in broader benefits to society.

Sound fiscal policy equally considers what we spend and what our communities get back. Efficiency should be measured by the value our investments produce and that includes our nonprofit partners, which themselves contribute about \$16 billion annually to Maine's economy.

2. Address Maine's housing, workforce, and demographic challenges together. Housing is workforce infrastructure. Maine needs housing that the people who live and work in our communities, can actually afford and investments in education, childcare, healthcare, and training that help us retain and attract workers.

Maine has the oldest population in the nation, and tens of thousands of Mainers are expected to retire in the coming years even as demand for healthcare, direct care, and other essential services grows. This creates a demographic challenge we cannot solve one issue at a time. Government, businesses, municipalities, and nonprofits need to work together to ensure Maine has both the workforce and community infrastructure needed to support people of every generation.

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3. A political system that's accessible, accountable, and sustainable. Running for office has reinforced for me how damaging our current political culture has become. We need to reduce the influence of big money and rethink a campaign system that increasingly measures "success" by how much money, and advertising, a candidate can sustain.

The cost isn't just financial, it discourages too many people from considering public service at all. In addition, it creates barriers for people without money or flexibility, exhausts candidates and volunteers, disrupts voters, and ultimately drives people away from the civic process altogether.

At a time when families are struggling so painfully, how do we justify pouring extraordinary amounts of money, labor, creativity, and human capacity into campaigns that too often divide us instead of directing more of that capacity toward solving the problems directly in front of us? A healthy democracy should make it easier, not harder, for ordinary people to participate. That will require stronger campaign-finance transparency, public financing, limits on unlimited outside spending, overturning *Citizens United*, and a fundamental rethinking of the purpose we want our politics to serve.

Please provide specific ways in which, if elected, you would partner with the nonprofit sector to achieve the goals of your campaign.

I view nonprofits as crucial partners and an important source of experience, expertise, and community knowledge—particularly on issues like housing, healthcare, childcare, workforce development, energy, and services for older Mainers. Where legislation directly affects the people they serve or the work they do, seeking input is critical to finding solutions that are meaningful.

I support simplifying the partnership by improving funding stability, reimbursement practices, and unnecessary administrative burdens in grants and contracts. If nonprofits

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are being asked to carry out essential public work, the systems around that work should support them in succeeding in place of making the job harder.

More broadly, I want state policy to better reflect what communities are experiencing on the ground. Nonprofits are often among the first to see where needs are growing, where services are falling short, and where promising solutions are emerging. I value that perspective as an important part of making better-informed decisions.

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