

FROM THE DESK OF GIONA PICHECO

Dear Neighbor,

When life has taken me to unexpected places, I've always leaned on what I learned from my parents: the value of hard work and the importance of standing up for people who are different. As I run to be your next State Representative, I want to share with you the principles that guide me and the journey that has shaped who I am today.

After high school, I couldn't afford college without taking on substantial debt. Growing up in a family that often struggled to pay utility bills and afford food, I wasn't willing to take on such debt. Instead, I worked in multiple part-time retail jobs more than 60 hours a week for minimum wage with no benefits. I felt how hard it was to pay the bills, and I saw that the lack of a degree kept me from reaching the jobs I dreamed of. Despite these challenges, I showed up every day and performed my responsibilities with a smile, having faith that things would turn around.

But after three exhausting years in retail, I was struggling to see a future for myself as the days went by. I knew I needed to create a change for myself. So, I decided to join the United States Navy for a sense of purpose and to do something meaningful with my life in service to this country. I enlisted as a Fire Control Technician and served on a nuclear-powered fast attack submarine for six years. Once again, I worked hard and did my job well. I studied the ins and outs of the ship, practiced emergency response, stood guard duty from the middle of the night to the busiest times of day, and was well trained in the operation and maintenance of the combat system.

During my service, I also gained the confidence to be true to myself and take steps to live my life more authentically, as a woman. However, within a matter of months, a discriminatory ban was announced to prohibit transgender people from serving in the military. It didn't sit well with me that people's rights could so arbitrarily be passed back and forth by politicians without consideration for the lived realities of servicemembers. In fact, having already excelled in my position and proving my dedication and efficiency, it was outright insulting to my commitment and abilities to perform my duty to this country. So, once my service was completed honorably in 2019, I decided to dedicate myself to doing all I can to protect the rights of others from being taken away and improving the quality of life for our community.

It was in the Navy where I met my partner, and after our service was complete, we decided to be together. He is the most supportive and loving person I know. After serving our country through multiple deployments, we bought a house in the Knightsville neighborhood of Cranston, a place that reminds me so much of the close-knit community of Ansonia where I grew up. It's a neighborhood filled with hardworking families and supportive neighbors, where everyone looks out for each other. For us, things were finally good: we have stable

jobs, great neighbors, and a fenced backyard for our two rescue dogs, Sam and Leia, to run around and play.

Throughout the time I have lived in Cranston, I have actively engaged with the community and regularly organized with neighbors, finding joy and purpose in making a difference together. We got the city to invest in green energy, helped establish a permanent diversity commission, elected local champions to fight for affordable housing and public education, defended reproductive rights, and pushed back against the NRA to win common sense gun safety measures at the State House. And I joined allies from across the state to protect our LGBTQ+ community.

In 2023, I graduated from URI with a degree in sociology and political science—the first in my family to earn a college degree. Getting the opportunity to go to college was a long process that I would not get to pursue until I was in my 30s. My family had always encouraged me to get an education, and now that I could finally pursue it, it would have meant the world to have my parents there with me to watch their child walk across the stage with a diploma, an opportunity they did not have nor their own parents. But unfortunately, they passed away before that moment and it was a crushing realization that I was really on my own. My hard work and success in school paid off, as I was then accepted into a graduate program for sociology at UMass Boston, where I currently teach my own class as a teaching fellow and am part of the graduate student union. My parents always knew I would do well in anything I put my mind to, and that I would never give up no matter how tough things were.

After running for State Representative in 2022 and coming up a bit short, I have continued to advocate for important legislation at the State House. Since then, I've been fighting big fights and decided to run again because I believe the biggest battles require a strong voice at the table. As the legislative chair of RI NOW, an organization dedicated to women's rights and equality, we fought for and passed significant bills that will truly improve the lives of Rhode Islanders. We ensured access to essential reproductive health care for all, protected medical professionals from unjust legal repercussions, and required safe storage of firearms to prevent accidents and protect our children. These victories didn't come easy—they were the result of tireless advocacy, collaboration, and the belief that we can make a difference.

These big fights have prepared me for the next crucial battle: ensuring that the wealthiest 1% of Rhode Islanders pay their fair share of taxes. Over a decade ago, tax breaks for the rich were passed into law, and since then, we've lost a total of \$1 billion in revenue that should be used to take care of our seniors, children, and veterans. This is a critical issue that needs to be addressed to ensure a fair and equitable society. I am ready to take on this really big fight because we need more legislators who are willing to tackle big challenges head-on.

While these state-level battles are crucial, we must not lose sight of the local quality of life issues that affect us daily. More work needs to be done to address these local issues in our area of Cranston and Providence. Sidewalks are in disrepair, speeding along residential roads

with young children is a recurring issue, strict overnight parking bans prevent our neighbors from securely parking their cars outside their own homes, and our streets flood way too often. In Cranston, the long-term closure of the Budlong Pool has left us with little relief from the intense summer heat. These issues are important, and I will work closely with our local elected officials to tackle them directly, ensuring our neighborhoods are safe, well-maintained, and thriving.

As a veteran, I also recognize the lack of a voice for veterans at the State House. Rhode Island is home to over 60,000 veterans who have bravely served our country and made tremendous sacrifices. These men and women have given so much to protect our freedoms, often at great personal cost. They face unique challenges, from accessing quality healthcare to securing stable housing and employment. Having served our country, I understand these struggles deeply and am committed to advocating for their needs and rights. It's our duty to ensure they receive the support and respect they deserve. My dedication to serving this country extends beyond the military to serving the people in our community, ensuring that our veterans are never forgotten and always honored.

Having the privilege to represent our community at the State House would be an honor. I look forward to the chance to earn your vote in the Democratic primary on September 10th.

I'm already out walking our neighborhoods and knocking on doors to introduce myself and learn what issues are most important to you—I hope to meet you soon. If you have any questions or ideas to share, please feel free to contact me at hello@gionapicheco.com or (401) 287-4092.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Giona Picheco', with a stylized, cursive script.

Giona Picheco