

ALTHEA GARRISON

b. October 7, 1940

TRANSGENDER STATE REPRESENTATIVE

She was the first transgender U.S. state legislator.

"It pays not to quit when you want something. You have to keep working until you get it."

Althea Garrison was the first elected transgender state legislator in the United States. She served one term in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1993 to 1995.

The youngest of seven children, Garrison was born male in the tiny town of Hahira, Georgia. At 19 she moved to Boston, planning to attend beauty school. Garrison instead attended Newbury Junior College, then received a bachelor's degree in business administration from Suffolk University. She went on to earn a master's degree in management from Lesley College and a certificate in special studies in administration and management from Harvard University. Garrison transitioned in Boston. She became Althea Garrison in 1976, legally changing both her first and last names.

In 1982 Garrison ran for the Massachusetts state legislature as a Democrat. It was her first bid for public office. Throughout the next decade, she ran and lost elections for a variety of seats, gradually moving from a Democrat to an Independent to a Republican.

In 1992 Garrison ran as a Republican for the Massachusetts House of Representatives. Although her transgender identity was an open secret among local politicians, it was unknown to her constituents. Days after winning the election, she was outed by a reporter who found her birth certificate and made her original name and sex public.

While in office, Garrison served as a member of the Housing Committee and the Election Law Committee. She sponsored and passed legislation to introduce mail-in voter registration and strongly supported workers' rights. Despite endorsements from eight local unions and the Massachusetts AFL-CIO, she lost reelection.

Garrison spent the next 34 years working as a human resources clerk in the Massachusetts State Comptroller's Office and continually running for office. She often devoted her vacation to campaigning. Although her political affiliation has been fluid, she has identified as an independent conservative since 2012.

In 2017 Garrison finished as the first runner-up in the Boston City Council election. The following year, Boston Councilmember Ayanna Pressley won a congressional bid and had to vacate her seat. Garrison was appointed to fill Pressley's remaining term. In 2019 Garrison became the most conservative member of the otherwise Democratic Boston City Council.

"I never quit," 78-year-old Garrison explained. "I'm constantly running, and I knew it would pay off." Despite advocating for affordable housing measures, including rent control and eviction protections, Garrison lost reelection to a Democratic challenger in 2020.

Garrison lives in Boston. She has appeared on the city's ballot more than 25 times.

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