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## ACLU

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said Carol Rose, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts. "People don't realize that the only checks and balances on district attorneys are at the voting booth."

Rose and others at the ACLU are looking to change limited voter awareness about district attorneys with a voter education project called "What a Difference a DA Makes."

According to an ACLU poll, 84 percent of Massachusetts voters think the state should "work to change the criminal justice system so that people are not treated differently based on race." Just 48 percent of respondents to the poll of 618 Massachusetts registered voters, conducted by a professional polling firm, said they thought the state's criminal justice system is working.

"This poll shows clearly that Massachusetts voters feel the criminal justice system is biased and ripe for reform," Rose said. "For far too long, the system has given preference to the connected and the wealthy, and Massachusetts voters say it's time for change. At the ACLU of Massachusetts, we remain committed to fighting for racial justice, ending over-incarceration and ensuring a fair justice system for everyone."

The Massachusetts ACLU campaign is part of the national organization's Campaign for Smart Justice, aimed at effecting criminal justice reform at the local level. Outside of Massachusetts, activist state and district attorneys like Baltimore State's Attorney Marilyn Mosby and Orlando's Aramis Ayala have taken on police abuse cases.

"There's a growing interest in reform candidates in district attorney races that is coinciding with our public education work," said Rahsaan Hall, director of the Racial Justice Program at the ACLU of Massachusetts.

In the commonwealth, no reform candidate has yet emerged. Of the 14 district attorneys in the state, all are white and just one is a woman. But state legislators have for several years been pushing for reforms that would diminish the power of district attorneys to impose harsh sentences on nonviolent offenders.

The Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus and the Progressive Caucus have sponsored various criminal justice reforms, including bills that would end mandatory minimums, raise the property value required for felony theft and guarantee the right to counsel for anyone facing incarceration, including those facing jail for failure to pay court-imposed fees and fines.

District attorneys, including Suffolk County's Dan Conley, have spoken out against the elimination of mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug crimes. Prosecutors have long favored the sentencing guidelines as a tool to pressure criminal defendants to plead guilty to lesser charges. Blacks and Latinos represent 20 percent of the state's population, but 40 percent of those incarcerated on drug offenses and 75 percent of those serving mandatory minimum sentences.

Conley was appointed Suffolk County District Attorney in 2002 to replace Ralph Martin, who left office for the private sector. Conley then was elected to the post in 2004, beating challengers Eddie

## Boston Medical Center rooftop farm



PHOTO: COURTESY BMC

The roof of Boston Medical Center's power plant has been transformed into the largest rooftop farm in the city. The 7,000 square feet of growing space, already flourishing with fresh produce, including arugula, bok choy, radishes, Swiss chard and kale, is expected to produce approximately 15,000 pounds of food this growing season, most of which is going directly to BMC patients. Here, children of patients and employees help with the harvest.

Jenkins and Brian Honan, but has not faced a significant electoral challenge since then.

The ACLU poll found that Massachusetts voters currently have limited knowledge of the power and budgets of district attorneys, and few realize that DAs are accountable only to voters, with little in the way of checks and balances in between elections. Half

of the registered voters polled said they believe individual district attorneys have only a minor or insignificant impact on the functioning of the criminal justice system. Almost four in ten did not know that district attorneys are elected and accountable only to voters. After hearing facts about the impact that district attorneys can have on individual lives and

communities, 81 percent of voters say they are more likely to pay attention to their local district attorney race in 2018.

Rose said the ACLU campaign could spark renewed interest in the office.

"Maybe it could prompt someone who is sitting on the sidelines," she said. "They may throw their hat in the ring."