



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Press Release

Violent Crime and Incarceration Rates Both Down in Massachusetts, DA Says

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Violent crime in the state is at a 41-year low^[1], even as Massachusetts' incarceration rate is 48th among the states and falling, according to Norfolk District Attorney Michael W. Morrissey.

"We see the headlines^[2] and the national reports, but in the current atmosphere of calls for sentencing reform both locally and nationally, it is important to look at what those number really mean," District Attorney Morrissey said.

"When you put it together, the Massachusetts Legislature, police, courts and my fellow District Attorneys have found a balance that is largely working – including our judicious use of minimum mandatory sentences," Morrissey said.

The per capita incarceration rate for Massachusetts is about 40 percent of the national average, and less than a quarter of the rate for Louisiana – the state with the highest percentage, according to Morrissey and national figures. Massachusetts' incarceration rates put it 48th among the states, and more in line with Canada and Western Europe than the rest of the United States."

"Our incarceration numbers are continuing to decline," Morrissey said. "From 2014 to 2015 we saw a decrease of 6.2 percent in prison admissions and a 2 percent increase in releases,^[3] so fewer are going in and more are coming out – even as the crime rate drops."

Morrissey said it is a blend of factors driving the trends and impossible to isolate a single factor. "It would be gratifying if it were all the work of the District Attorneys or police, but that cannot be the case," he said

"But Massachusetts District Attorneys have been quick to embrace drug courts, mental health courts, domestic violence courts, veterans courts and other specialized interventions crafted to disrupt the patterns that keep some people engaged in self-defeating cycles that lead to criminal activity," he said. "Norfolk Sheriff Michael Bellotti, his counter parts, and the state corrections department provide education and vocational training to inmates who want a chance to change."

While Massachusetts has already reformed some minimum-mandatory sentences, the Norfolk District Attorney cautioned against upsetting a statutory scheme that is showing success both in public safety and in low incarceration rates

Minimum-mandatory sentences are aimed at drug dealers and traffickers, not addicts and users, according to the DA. "We should focus on programs and post-conviction supervision to cut recidivism rates," Morrissey said. "The drug epidemic is still taking its toll on us and more work is needed to treat individuals with addiction issues."

[1] <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2015/crime-in-the-u.s.-2015/tables/table-5>

[2] <http://www.patriotledger.com/news/20161230/violent-crime-rate-sinks-to-41-year-low-in-massachusetts>

[3] <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p15.pdf> (see page 5)