

ELIZABETH WARREN
MASSACHUSETTS

COMMITTEES:
BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS
ARMED SERVICES
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

United States Senate

UNITED STATES SENATE
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2105
P: 202-224-4543

2400 JFK FEDERAL BUILDING
15 NEW SUDBURY STREET
BOSTON, MA 02203
P: 617-565-3170

1550 MAIN STREET
SUITE 406
SPRINGFIELD, MA 01103
P: 413-788-2690

www.warren.senate.gov

Chief Steven J. Wojnar
Dudley Police Department
President, Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association
353 Providence Road
South Grafton, MA 01560

Dear Chief Wojnar,

Thank you for your thoughtful comments. I've since spoken to you on the phone, and, as I promised, here's a written response.

Yesterday I met a man who talked to me about his son. He said his son had gone to the police academy to serve his community and his country, and every day his son puts on his uniform and puts his life on the line in the service of others. The risks are real: this year two Massachusetts officers made the ultimate sacrifice. The father rightly worries about his son's safety, but he is also deeply proud of him – as he should be.

The criminal justice system encompasses many layers – from law enforcement to court reporters to parole officers. I have been fortunate to meet many people who serve in different parts of the criminal justice system, and I know there are hundreds of thousands more dedicated public servants who work difficult and dangerous jobs and are committed to improving that system. I am grateful for their service.

I have also met with people whose lives have been shattered by a broken criminal justice system. I have held mothers who wept while they have talked of the sons and daughters they have lost due to senseless violence. I have met children who are growing up without their fathers or mothers because of senseless laws. I have met women who cannot rebuild their lives or rejoin their families because of a criminal conviction.

As I have said for many years, I believe that there are serious issues of racial injustice throughout our criminal justice system. The problems are front to back, starting with Congress, which bears responsibility for outdated drug laws, unfair sentencing requirements, and the continued failure to get meaningful reform legislation over the finish line. Studies show that these problems exist throughout every stage of our system: for the exact same crimes, black people are more likely to be arrested than their white counterparts,¹ more likely to be prosecuted than their white

¹ FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program, "Crime in the United States 2016," <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crimein-the-u.s/2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/topic-pages/persons-arrested>; School of Criminal Justice, University at Albany, "Reassessing and Redirecting Research on Race and Sentencing," Eric P. Baumer, June 25, 2010, https://www.albany.edu/scj/documents/Baumer_Race.pdf.

counterparts,² more likely to be wrongfully convicted than their white counterparts,³ and more likely to receive harsher sentences than their white counterparts.⁴ Injustice pervades the treatment and services available to those who are incarcerated and the ability of those who have served their sentences to successfully reintegrate into our communities.

I believe that acknowledging these issues is a step toward addressing them. Despite the sensitivities around this conversation, all of us who serve the public interest, beginning with people like me who help write laws in Congress, have a collective moral responsibility to face these problems head-on and to work toward reform.

The problems with our criminal justice system would be much easier to solve if we could simply point to an individual, or a group of individuals, as their principal cause. There are important actors in that system with a well-documented lack of commitment to racial justice, starting with Attorney General Sessions, who has a disgraceful record on race and has worked unapologetically to undermine improvements in police-community relations since the day he took office, and with President Trump, whose disgraceful record on race continues as he nominates federal judges with a demonstrated hostility to civil rights to lifetime appointments on the federal bench.

But the problems with our justice system run much deeper than one Administration. They are system-wide; they are structural. And they will require all of us working together to fix them. Massachusetts and its law enforcement are national leaders in this regard, recently passing landmark criminal justice reform legislation, but there is still much work to do. For my part, I have advocated for important reforms at the federal level, including federal criminal justice reform legislation, bipartisan marijuana legislation that would end marijuana arrests in states like Massachusetts that have legalized it, and the *Dignity for Incarcerated Women Act*, a bill to help address the unjust conditions faced by women in prison.

I also want to call out once again the need for Congress to provide law enforcement professionals with the resources they need to effectively do their jobs. I find it particularly frustrating that law enforcement officers are regularly asked to do more for our communities while receiving less support from the rest of us. That's why I've fought hard in the Senate to block efforts to freeze pay and cut retirement benefits for public officials and fought to protect the right of law enforcement to bargain collectively at all levels of government. And that's why the Massachusetts delegation has worked to bring funding and resources in order to help our police and others pay for the staff and equipment necessary to protect themselves and our communities.

² Vera Institute of Justice, "Do Race and Ethnicity Matter in Prosecution? A Review of Empirical Studies," Besiki Kutateladze, Vanessa Lynn and Edward Liang, June 2012, https://storage.googleapis.com/vera-web-assets/downloads/Publications/do-race-and-ethnicity-matter-in-prosecution-a-review-of-empirical-studies/legacy_downloads/race-and-ethnicity-in-prosecution-first-edition.pdf.

³ Newkirk Center for Science and Society, "Race and Wrongful Convictions in the United States," Samuel R. Gross, Maurice Possley and Klara Stephens, March 7, 2017, https://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Documents/Race_and_Wrongful_Convictions.pdf.

⁴ U.S. Sentencing Commission, "Demographic Differences in Sentencing: An Update to the 2012 Booker Report," November 2017, https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/research-publications/2017/20171114_Demographics.pdf.

I'm also proud of bringing in new money to help relieve student loan debt burdens for public servants and help bring more talented young people into this work.

The impact of funding shortages echoes throughout the system. Budget cuts for public defenders make it hard for anyone who is not wealthy to have the help they need navigating the criminal justice system. After a person has served a prison sentence, many pathways to rebuilding a successful life and supporting a family are effectively cut off – all because Congress has turned its back on people who need help but who have few advocates in Washington.

I look forward to continuing our work together, and I will remain committed to pushing our criminal justice system to live up to the words written above our Supreme Court – “Equal Justice Under Law.”

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Elizabeth Warren". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Elizabeth Warren