

RESOURCE GUIDE

S5 E1: They're Running for Office to Change the Criminal (Injustice) System



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million

ONE JAIL AT A TIME.

story

The Impact of Elections on Reforming the Criminal Justice System

The effort toward reform of the criminal justice system is driven by grassroots organizations across the country, but long-lasting reform on the local, state, and federal levels starts at the ballot box. Whom we decide to elect as Judges, District Attorneys, and Congressmen are vital in representing, instilling, and upholding the legislative change we need to see.

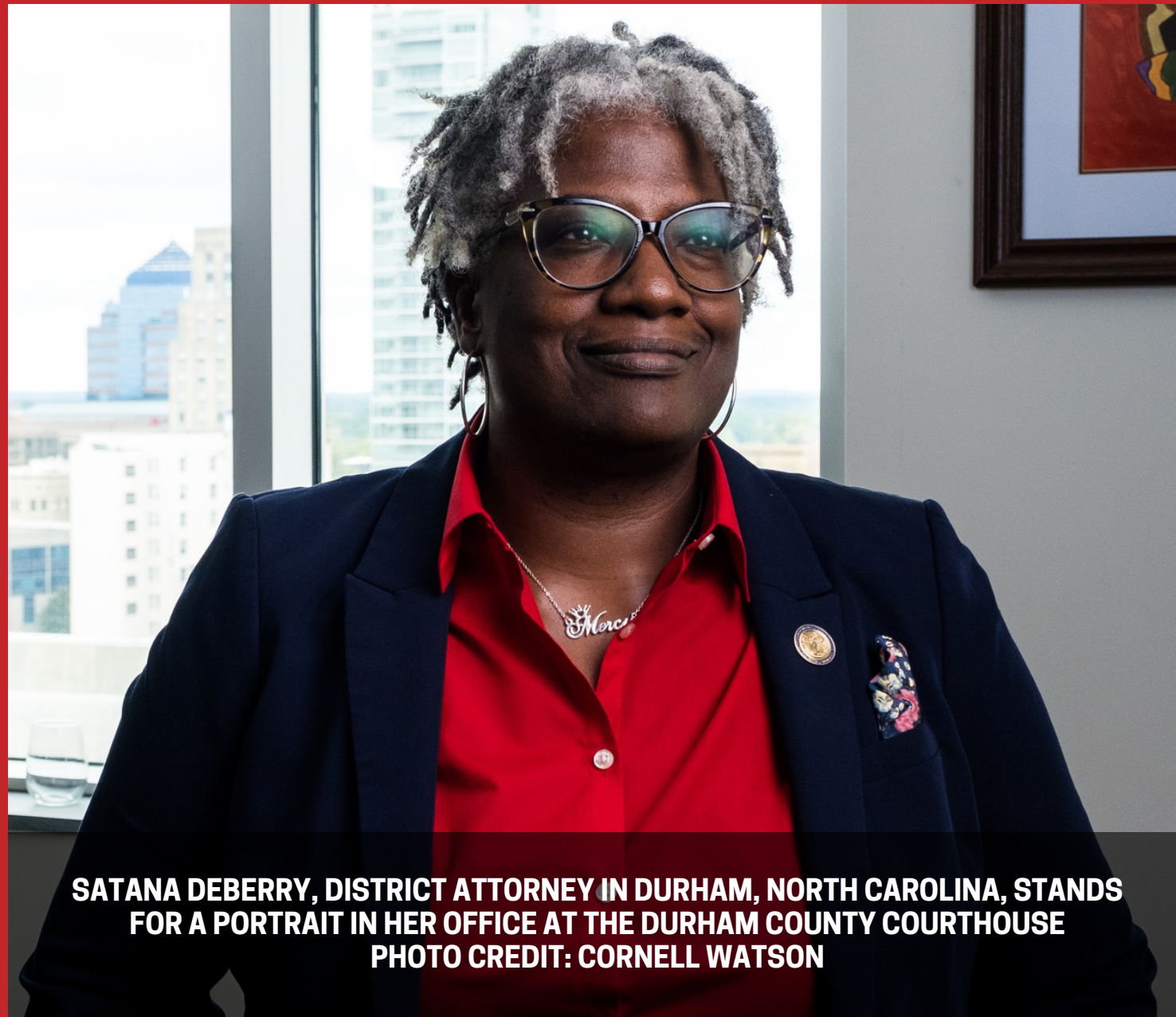
Over 97% of cases in the federal criminal justice system are resolved with plea bargains. That's less than 3% of defendants taking advantage of one of their most important constitutional rights. According to the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NADCL), "As trials and hearings decline, so too does government accountability. Government mistakes and misconduct are rarely uncovered...Moreover, the ease of conviction can encourage sloppiness and a diminution of the government's obligation to fairness."

As expressed through Forum by Michigan's Supreme Court Chief Justice, Bridget McCormack, "Although ethical constraints limit the form of their advocacy, effective law reform depends on judges' contributions and they are ethically obligated to improve the judicial system over which they preside." Understanding the background and platforms of judges up for election, or re-election help to make more informed decisions on who is aligned with criminal justice reform, and who may be influenced by prosecutorial bias. "Courts have explained that bias is a favorable or unfavorable opinion that is inappropriate because it is not deserved, rests upon [the] knowledge that the judge should not possess, or because it is excessive." as defined by Dallas Criminal Lawyer Robert Guest.

Santana Deberry served as the District Attorney of Durham County, NC in 2018 and is currently running for re-election uncontested. "The real power that the prosecutor has is in discretion...It says, as a prosecutor, as an elected prosecutor, I am the stand-in for my community and accountability for my community."

Running for 2022 Superior Court Judge in Los Angeles, CA, Carolyn "Jiyoung" Park shares, "The issues that we're confronted with, they didn't pop up overnight...It's going to be a multi-pronged solution. Judges are just a small part of that, but a very important part of the solution. When they do get in front of a judge, will that defendant have a judge that is fair?"

Maxwell Alejandro Frost, a running Democratic candidate for the House in Florida's 10th Congressional District, adds, "So we've been very honest in our campaign...promising what I'm going to fight for, how hard I'm going to fight for it...Because it's not about me fighting for the community. It's about me fighting with the community to make it happen."



**SATANA DEBERRY, DISTRICT ATTORNEY IN DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA, STANDS FOR A PORTRAIT IN HER OFFICE AT THE DURHAM COUNTY COURTHOUSE
PHOTO CREDIT: CORNELL WATSON**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Do you think running on reform of the criminal legal system helped you stand out from the other candidates? And do you think it's enough of a motivating issue to help you win in November?

I want to talk about how the political climate plays into getting reform enacted. In 2020, we saw high-profile cases involving the unjust killings of members of Black and Brown communities. How much does the political climate play into enacting reform?

To borrow a line from Laura Coates, we have "legal system aspiring to be a justice system." Are you encouraged that people seem to now want to take on this issue? And what do you think is the next level of reform? What do you hope we're talking about 25 years from now?

PEOPLE DOING THE WORK



MAXWELL ALEJANDRO FROST, A CANDIDATE FOR FLORIDA'S 10TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT IS PICTURED IN HIS CAMPAIGN OFFICE IN ORLANDO, FL
PHOTO CREDIT: OCTAVIO JONES

2022 CANDIDATES

Santana Deberry - Re-elect For District Attorney 2022, NC

"Safety and Justice for All. Everyone has the right to be protected and respected and to succeed. With a career centered around supporting and defending people and fixing broken systems, District Attorney Santana Deberry is focused on keeping Durham County a fairer, safer, and more vibrant home for everyone."

Carolyn Jiyoung Park - For Superior Court Judge 2022, CA

"Justice for all requires common sense laws and judges who apply the laws fairly."

Maxwell Alejandro Frost - For Congress 2022, FL

"I've dedicated my life to fighting for justice. As a young man, I experienced police abuse firsthand and saw my community ravaged by gun violence. And I've experienced how working people and people of color are unjustly marginalized and left behind in our society."

Do you want to go in front of a judge who's going to disregard the law because of their personal opinions? Or do you want to go in front of a judge that is going to apply the law fairly? That has worked with people in your community. That is of your community.

That is the choice before voters.

- Maxwell Alejandro Frost

National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers

"NACDL's mission is to serve as a leader, alongside diverse coalitions, in identifying and reforming flaws and inequities in the criminal legal system, and redressing systemic racism, and ensuring that its members and others in the criminal defense bar are fully equipped to serve all accused persons at the highest level."

Vera

"Mass incarceration robs people of dignity and tears at the fabric of communities. Vera brings researchers, organizers, and government leaders together to create evidence-based solutions that restore communities and end mass incarceration. When a solution works, we scale it nationwide."

Brennan Center For Justice

"The Brennan Center for Justice is a nonpartisan law and policy institute. We strive to uphold the values of democracy. We stand for equal justice and the rule of law. We work to craft and advance reforms that will make American democracy work, for all."

Fair and Just Prosecution

"Fair and Just Prosecution (FJP) brings together elected local prosecutors as part of a network of leaders committed to promoting a justice system grounded in fairness, equity, compassion, and fiscal responsibility."

Restorative Justice Exchange

"Strengthening restorative practices in programs for prisoners, victims and families of prisoners."

Prison Policy Initiative

"The non-profit, non-partisan Prison Policy Initiative produces cutting edge research to expose the broader harm of mass criminalization, and then sparks advocacy campaigns to create a more just society."

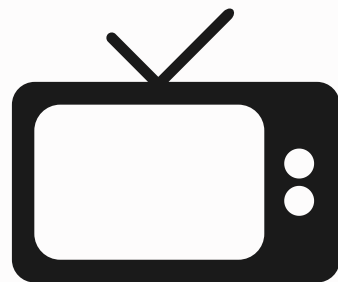


CAROLYN "JIYOUNG" PARK, CANDIDATE FOR JUDGE OF THE SUPERIOR COURT, OFFICE NO. 118, IS PICTURED AT THE MICHELTORNA STAIRS IN LOS ANGELES, CALIF. PARK GREW UP IN THIS AREA, AND SAID THE WELL-KNOWN LOS ANGELES STAIRCASE HAVE SENTIMENTAL VALUE TO HER. SHE SAID TO HER, THE STAIRS REPRESENT INCLUSIVITY AND SYSTEMS OF CARE
PHOTO CREDIT: ALISHA JUCEVIC

For further education...

THIS WEEK'S MEDIA SPOTLIGHT

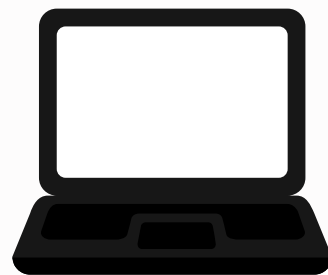
Video



[United Justice Coalition Summit 2022](#)

[Second Look = Second Chance: The Case for Reconsidering Lengthy & Extreme Sentences](#)
by the NADCL_

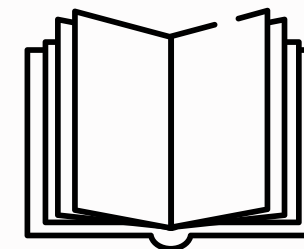
Websites



[The Defenders of Justice](#)

[RestoreYourVote](#) by CLC
*For convicted felons curious
about restoring their voting rights

Reading



['The Future We Deserve': This Florida Gen Z Candidate Thinks He Can Chart a New Path For the Youth](#) by Sabrina Rodriguez

[The IRAA and SLAA: Moving Beyond Nonviolent Drug Offenders to Address Mass Incarceration](#)
by Jonathan Blanks

[The Right to Vote & the Criminal Justice System](#)
by CLC

[Prosecutor Politics: The Impact of Election Cycles on Criminal Sentencing in the Era of Rising Incarceration](#)
by Chika O. Okafor

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