



SUFFOLK COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
DISTRICT ATTORNEY RACHAEL ROLLINS

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Dear Attorneys Benedetti and Kelleher,

Thank you for your thoughtful letter of May 1st and our candid conversation on May 4th in response to comments I made during a recent appearance on WGBH public radio. I appreciate your openness to constructive dialogue, and I know this will be the continuation of our long-term collaboration to improve how both prosecutors and defense counsel can serve the people who make up our shared client base. We all want justice to be served, and for everyone who comes to us to be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness.

When James from Webster called into the radio show with his question, I heard in his voice the desperation and confusion of my loved ones who have struggled to make sense of the criminal justice system and the countless people who approached me on the campaign, in supermarket, and on the street to express painfully similar stories. They are stories of unreturned calls and letters and a general lack of urgency and responsiveness. They are punctuated by long-bottled-up feelings of rage, sadness, and exasperation at an entire system that they experience as bewildering and diminishing at best, or rigged and dehumanizing at worst.

I simply wanted to help James contact his attorney. I should have made clearer in the moment that my response to James was never directed at, or intended for, the overwhelming majority of court-appointed lawyers who work tirelessly for their clients: accepting every collect call, working around the clock, speaking to families and loved ones, and currently putting themselves in harm's way every time they

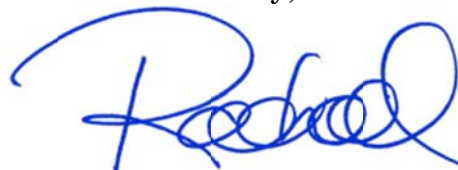
visit a correctional facility to serve their clients. CPCS attorneys and bar counsel are hardworking public servants who are committed to advocating on behalf of the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized. I know this in my core. I was speaking to the court-appointed attorney for James who wasn't returning calls about his upcoming trial, and I was demanding responsiveness from other attorneys who are not prioritizing contact with their clients.

We can all do better. We must all do better.

And we can do it together. As you know, I have strongly advocated for increasing the CPCS budget, as the only District Attorney to write an amicus letter in support of advocates in western Massachusetts. I have personally fought with several of my fellow district attorneys about respecting the hard work of your staff and your organization. I have hired experienced bar advocates into my leadership team because I know their work and training will allow them to approach prosecution with compassion, courage, and tactical brilliance. I have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the defense bar in ICE litigation and in advancing decarceration, even filing a motion to join the recent litigation in the SJC as a Petitioner, not a Respondent. I have called you and various members of the defense bar personally to get valuable input and insight into urgent matters within my own office because I value your opinions. I have been inclusive of CPCS in ways my predecessors and fellow district attorneys would never have imagined and actively still frown upon. And I will continue to do so because our missions are often aligned and our success — justice — is linked.

What this global pandemic has taught us is that a public health approach to criminal justice only works if everyone is working toward the common goal of keeping our communities healthy, safe, and strong. A failure to protect the most vulnerable and least empowered among us is to jeopardize the health and safety of our entire community. So let's work together to identify the ways in which we can work toward this goal. Where we have common ground, let's continue to till it. And in spots that are more rocky and unstable, let's commit to open and honest communication so that we can find a way forward.

In solidarity,



Rachael Rollins
District Attorney

Cc: Atty. Aviva Jeruchim, Board of Directors, MACDL, and Supervisor, SLJ
Atty. Steve Sacks, Co-Chair, SLJ