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ACLU Launches Prosecutor Accountability Initiative ^[1]

With new statewide poll showing broad support for reducing Vermont's prison population, ACLU invites Vermont state's attorney candidates to share views with constituents ahead of 2018 elections

MONTPELIER—With state's attorneys on the ballot statewide in 2018, the ACLU is highlighting the critical but often unseen role of elected prosecutors in Vermont's criminal justice system. As part of the ACLU's Campaign for Smart Justice, the ACLU of Vermont today sent a [detailed survey](#) ^[2] to the candidates running for state's attorney in Vermont, requesting their views on key criminal justice issues including the opiate epidemic, police accountability, and racial disparities in Vermont's criminal justice system.

Despite the significant power elected prosecutors have to shape outcomes in their communities, this is the first time all candidates for Vermont state's attorney have been asked to state their views on the record for their constituents.

ACLU of Vermont community organizer Nico Amador: "When it comes to criminal justice, no public official has more power and less accountability than elected prosecutors. State's attorney candidates are running for an important public office, and it's critical for them to be open about their policy positions and for voters to know about the decisions that are being made in their name."

A May 2018 [poll of Vermont voters](#) ^[3] found broad support for criminal justice reform in Vermont, with two out of three saying it was important to reduce the number of Vermonters in prison. In addition:

- Two out of three Vermonters said they were more likely to support a candidate committed to reducing the number of incarcerated Vermonters by emphasizing alternatives to incarceration like drug treatment, mental health services, and restorative justice.
- 77% said they were more likely to support a candidate who would hold police and prosecutors accountable for misconduct.
- 72% said they would be more likely to support a candidate who committed to making prosecutors' decisions more transparent by sharing data with the public.

While Vermonters support criminal justice reform, many are not aware of the important role of state's attorneys in shaping Vermont's criminal justice system. In the same ACLU poll, 42% of respondents felt they knew little or nothing at all about state's attorneys' duties. After hearing a brief description of a state's attorney's responsibilities, 92% said the role their state's attorney played in their community was important.

In Vermont as in the rest of the country, the vast majority of criminal cases are resolved through plea bargains. As a result, it is usually a prosecutor rather than a judge who decides whether or not

someone goes to prison and for how long. State's attorneys are also a strong presence in Vermont's legislature, providing testimony for or against reform legislation.

ACLU of Vermont executive director James Llyall: "We often say that state's attorneys are the most powerful politician you've never heard of. If we're going to build a smarter, fairer system of justice in this state, that has to change. Every day, state's attorneys make life-altering decisions in the name of their constituents, and Vermont voters have a right to know if those decisions reflect their priorities and their values."

The ACLU will publish the candidates' responses verbatim in a voter guide, which will be posted on the ACLU of Vermont website by the end of June. In addition to the survey, the ACLU will be organizing a series of public education events, including canvassing efforts and candidate forums in the weeks ahead. Primary elections for state's attorney will be held on August 14th, 2018, general elections on November 6th, 2018.

The ACLU of Vermont's candidate survey is available here: <https://bit.ly/2Jy98KW> [2]

Results from the ACLU's May 2018 poll of Vermont voters are available here: <https://bit.ly/2LnLuOP> [3]

Information about candidates running for state's attorney can be found on the Secretary of State's website: <https://www.sec.state.vt.us/elections/candidates.aspx> [4]

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