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January 10, 2019

Law School News

Boston's New DA Will Deliver MLK Address

The first African-American woman to serve as a District Attorney in Massachusetts, Rachael Rollins will address mass incarceration and criminal justice reform.



Rachael Rollins, District Attorney for Suffolk County, Massachusetts.
Image Credit: Diana Levine

January 10, 2019 Michael M. Bowden

BRISTOL, R.I., Jan. 10, 2019 – Rachael Rollins, the first African-American woman to serve as District Attorney in Massachusetts and the first female DA in Suffolk County, will deliver this year's Martin Luther King Jr. Keynote Lecture at Roger Williams University School of Law.

In one of her first speaking engagements since being sworn in on Jan. 2, Rollins will appear for a conversation with RWU Law students, faculty, alumni and staff on Wednesday, Jan. 23, 2019 at 4:00 p.m. in Room 285. The event is also open to the public. Those wishing to attend should RSVP to lawevents@rwu.edu.

A former state and federal prosecutor, Rollins was elected in November on a criminal justice reform platform that focused on reducing racial disparities in the criminal justice system.

Rollins' election was historic. Only 1 percent of elected prosecutors in the United States are women of color. Her goals include eliminating cash bail for minor offenses, reducing mass incarceration, and ending the use of mandatory minimum sentences.

“We are no longer going to criminalize poverty, mental illness and substance use disorder,” Rollins said. “We are going to end the wealth and racial disparities in our incarceration rates. We are going to hear and listen to the voices of survivors of sexual assault and of homicide. And we are going to focus our resources on those who undermine public safety with acts of gun violence, domestic violence and sexual assault, and homicide.”

Rollins has been a lawyer for over 20 years. As a state and federal prosecutor, she handled cases involving civil rights violations, fraud, sexual predators, narcotics, violence and weapons. She also clerked on the Massachusetts Appeals Court. Rollins served as general counsel of both the MBTA and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. In those roles, she managed over 150 employees and was responsible for overseeing thousands of cases per year. She left to become the Chief Legal Counsel for the Massachusetts Port Authority. She has sat on Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey's Advisory Council on Racial Justice and Equity, was an appointee of former Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick to the state's Judicial Nominating Commission, is a past president of the Massachusetts Black Lawyers Association, and served a three-year term on the Boston Bar Association Council.

The Martin Luther King, Jr., Keynote Lecture is presented in honor of the contribution of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to the Civil Rights Movement, and with the generous support of Nixon Peabody LLP, and the RWU Law Office of Diversity & Outreach.