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Boston College Law School

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## US Attorney Carmen Ortiz to Speak at BC Law on March 26

2014 NEWS ARCHIVE

03/22/14

Newton, MA--US Attorney for Massachusetts Carmen Ortiz will be addressing the Department of Justice's "Smart on Crime" initiative on Wednesday, March 26th, 2014 during a speech at Boston College Law School. The event will take place at 5:30 pm in the school's East Wing building, Room 120. This will mark one of the first venues Ortiz will discuss the crime fighting plan, which has been viewed by some as controversial.

Ortiz, the Bay state's first Latina US Attorney, will appear at a forum sponsored by the Latin American Law Student Association of Boston College. She'll be discussing the federal government's initiative that, among other things, prioritizes prosecution to focus on the most serious of cases, enacts sentencing reform to eliminate unfair disparities, and pursues non-prison alternatives for low level offenders. Among the topics Ortiz is certain to touch on: how will the initiative impact Massachusetts and the communities that may feel disenfranchised by the criminal justice system?

"It's a really important initiative because long mandatory sentences haven't been proven to do anything other than increase the cost of public safety," says Boston College Law Professor Michael Cassidy, former head of the State Attorney General's Criminal Bureau. "They haven't improved public safety – they've just increased the costs of it, and they've been a resource drain on state and federal budgets. In an era of limited resources, there are smarter things we can do with our money than to spend \$30,000 - \$50,000 per inmate each year on incarceration, especially for non-violent crimes like drugs and property offenses. Long periods of incarceration just don't work, and they don't make any fiscal sense."

Professor Cassidy, who will introduce Ortiz, recently wrote a law review article on the topic, and says halfway houses, drug treatment facilities, or shorter terms of incarceration followed by work release are the kinds of programs that have been proven to lower recidivism for certain classes of crime.

"The United States imprisons more people than any other country—including China, a nation with almost four times our population. "We're disrupting families, we're disrupting social structures. We're releasing these prisoners to the street with few skills and not much incentive not to return to a life of crime. A smarter approach to crime is to have shorter periods of incarceration followed by more intense parole supervision and innovative programs to help reduce the risk of re-offending."