



Department of Justice



Office of Justice Programs

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*****PUBLICATION ADVISORY*****

NIJ Releases *Mending Justice: Sentinel Event Reviews*

WASHINGTON – The Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice (NIJ) released *Mending Justice: Sentinel Event Reviews*, a special report that explores the feasibility of using a new learning-from-error model in criminal justice.

A “sentinel event” is a negative outcome, such as the conviction of an innocent person, the release of a dangerous person from prison, or a near miss in which an innocent person was arrested and held until the error was finally discovered and greater harm was avoided. In the primary essay in *Mending Justice*, James Doyle, a former NIJ Visiting Fellow, writes that a sentinel event is rarely the fault of a single individual. Rather, multiple small errors combine and are exacerbated by underlying system weaknesses and the big error results.

Based on this “organizational accident” principle, a sentinel event review brings together all stakeholders to examine the error in a nonblaming and forward-looking or preventative way.

As a science agency, NIJ is exploring whether sentinel event reviews — which have successfully been used to make improvements in other high-risk fields such as medicine and aviation — could work in the criminal justice system. In *Mending Justice*, Attorney General Eric Holder offers an introductory message and 16 nationally recognized criminal justice researchers and practitioners provide short commentaries.

TITLE: Special Report: Justice Lessons: Sentinel Events in Criminal Justice

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