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

**PUBLISHER:** National Institute of Justice [www.nij.gov](http://www.nij.gov)


###

The Office of Justice Programs, headed by Assistant Attorney General Karol V. Mason, provides federal leadership in developing the nation’s capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice and assist victims. OJP has six components: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering and Tracking. More information about OJP can be found at [www.ojp.gov](http://www.ojp.gov)