

REMARKS

OF

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AT THE

**NATIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN DRUG POLICY COALITION, INC.
NATIONAL SPRING 2013 SUMMIT**

ON

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WASHINGTON, DC**

Thank you very much, Judge Burnett. I'm delighted to be here – and it's terrific to see you again, Judge. I've known Judge Burnett since his days on the bench when I was serving as U.S. Attorney here in D.C. It's great to join him here.

I'd like to thank Dr. Price, Judge Burnett, and the National African American Drug Policy Coalition for inviting me to speak today, and for your advocacy of a more just and humane approach to addressing substance abuse. Your organization stands for two very important principles: accountability based on compassion and treatment grounded in evidence. We share your commitment to these principles at the Department of Justice and throughout the Obama Administration.

The issues you're discussing here at this summit – the intersection of drugs and crime, gang and youth violence, the future of juvenile justice – are all issues the Department of Justice and my office, the Office of Justice Programs, are working diligently to address. Much of the public discussion of crime and justice in recent years has focused on what is sometimes referred to as "The Great Crime Decline," the steady drop in crime rates over the last two decades. This has, indeed, been a very positive national trend, and something worth celebrating. . . to a point. But it's not the full story.

Although crime rates are down nationally, some cities – and particularly, certain communities within those cities – are seeing crime move in the opposite direction. In these communities, drugs, guns, and gangs exercise an unmistakable influence. Violence is a daily, and a deadly, fact of life. What's even more troubling is that much of this violence, especially in inner-city African American neighborhoods, is being committed by and against our young people.

It's a tragic fact that black males between the ages of 16 and 19 have the highest rate of violent victimization of any race and any age group. For African American boys and young men between the ages of 10 and 24, homicide is not only the leading cause of death, it results in more deaths than the next four leading causes combined.

But this is not beyond changing. Crime and violence are not inevitable for inner-city youth, or for any group, and a future full of hope and opportunity is within reach, if only we have the collective will to help them achieve it.

Experience and research show that when communities work in partnership, across disciplines and across levels of government, and adopt balanced approaches that rely on the evidence, it's possible to reduce violence and increase positive outcomes for our youth. This involves breaking down barriers between different sectors of the community and building trust between groups who have not always agreed on solutions.

During my years as a federal prosecutor, I saw how critical it is that professionals in the system be willing to reach out to community members and work with them to solve problems. I set up a community prosecution unit to provide a vehicle for outreach, and I was amazed at the level of cooperation and good will that resulted. It made a huge

difference in our ability, not just to bring criminals to justice, but to really help solve community problems.

We're modeling that kind of engagement through our work at the Department of Justice. We have an effort called the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention, which is led by the White House and involves several federal agencies. We're working across departments and in partnership with communities to address youth violence in a strategic, comprehensive manner. We bring together citizens, faith-based and community organizations, law enforcement, public health professionals, business and philanthropic leaders, and others to share ideas and explore solutions.

Ten cities are implementing comprehensive plans aimed at reducing violent crime and improving opportunities for youth. We've gotten very high levels of support for this effort, both from within the Administration and from local leaders. Community stakeholders are working together to design bold new strategies to tackle their most intractable problems, and the work they're doing is very promising.

We also support an effort called the Community-Based Violence Prevention Demonstration Program. This is an initiative administered by our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention that supports research-based efforts designed to prevent and reduce youth violence. You may have heard of a program called CeaseFire that was pioneered in Boston a number of years ago. This was a collaborative between law enforcement, human services, and neighborhood leaders where the police – working with residents – identified perpetrators, arrested the most serious offenders, and held them up to others as an example of the fate that awaited them if they didn't change their ways.

But they didn't just use threats. They also told the lower-level offenders that if they were willing to change their behavior, help was available in the form of treatment, job training, housing – whatever they needed to get back on track. And this approach worked very well. Boston saw significant reductions in violent crime.

The model has been tested in other cities, as well, perhaps most notably in High Point, North Carolina, where it was applied to open-air drug markets. They saw similar reductions in drugs and crime, and not because the police were locking people away in large numbers. It worked because the community sent a strong message that this behavior wouldn't be tolerated, but it also said our goal is not to write you off, but to help you out. My agency's program builds off these and other models, and I'm really pleased that President Obama's budget request – which was just released last week – includes substantial funding to continue these efforts.

As we all know, intervention is more effective the earlier it happens. Two years ago, the Attorney General launched his Defending Childhood Initiative to address the troubling incidence of children who are exposed to violence in our country. The numbers are startling, and tomorrow you'll hear from Bob Listenbee, the new administrator of our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Bob was co-chair of the Attorney General's Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence before joining my agency, and I know he'll talk about the work we're doing to promote early intervention and counter the effects of violence in children's lives. But I'll just note here that the evidence is clear that intervention works, and the impact of crime can be mitigated.

And just as we want to interrupt the cycle of violence as early as possible, we need to make sure that youth and adults who come into the juvenile and criminal justice systems return to their communities better equipped to stay crime- and drug-free.

If we really want our corrections system to live up to its name, we can't be content with just locking offenders away. Ninety-five percent of the more than 2.2 million people incarcerated in our nation's correctional facilities will return to their communities at some point. If we fail to prepare them for their return, we're asking for trouble.

Here, too, we've been working hard to provide treatment, education, job training, family counseling, and other services to inmates, trying to help them become contributing members of their communities once they've served their time. Under the Second Chance Act – which was really a transformative, not to mention bipartisan, piece of federal legislation – we've awarded over 400 grants to support adult and juvenile reentry programs in communities across the country. And we're actively involved in the Federal Interagency Reentry Council, which is chaired by the Attorney General and joined by the heads of 20 federal agencies. The Council is working to strengthen reentry policies and promote successful reentry programs across the country.

Similarly, through an initiative called Justice Reinvestment, we're working with private partners to help state leaders, policymakers, and practitioners reform their corrections and criminal justice practices. This is an effort led by our Bureau of Justice Assistance – and you'll hear tomorrow from BJA's director, Denise O'Donnell, tomorrow.

Justice Reinvestment looks at crime and corrections trends and helps officials determine how they can both curb corrections costs and achieve greater public safety. In the 17 states that have participated thus far, many are redirecting resources away from building prisons and putting that money into services like treatment and supervision designed to prevent recidivism. And what's remarkable about it is that this is happening in both blue and red states.

This emphasis on supervision and evidence-based treatment is, to my mind, one of the most important and exciting developments in our field. There's a very promising example pioneered in Hawaii called HOPE. HOPE stands for Hawaii Opportunity Probation with Enforcement. It was started by a circuit court judge in Honolulu named Steven Alm, and what it does is apply immediate, predictable, and proportionate

sanctions for probation violators. The idea is that swift and certain but modest sanctions, like a short jail stay for failing a drug test, are more effective than harsh punishments.

It's worked very well. A study by our National Institute of Justice found that participants were 72 percent less likely to use drugs and 55 percent less likely to be re-arrested. We're now testing this approach in other jurisdictions.

But when it comes to drugs, we know that the only way the justice system is going to realize its full potential as a problem solver is by using its authority to encourage and support treatment. And there's no better illustration of how this can work than the drug court.

Drug courts use the authority of the judicial system to bring together criminal and juvenile justice agencies and social service and treatment providers to deal with the underlying causes of addiction in drug-involved offenders. In other words, it's court-sanctioned and court-supported treatment. There are more than 2,600 drug courts in operation across the country, and our research shows that they're effective in reducing recidivism, decreasing future drug use, and saving money.

Our challenge is to expand the drug court approach. Right now, they serve some 120,000 people, but that's only a fraction of the 1.2 million non-violent drug offenders now in the system. At the Office of Justice Programs, we're continuing a proud tradition of supporting drug courts, going back to my early days at the agency under Attorney General Janet Reno, who started the first drug court program in Miami. Continuing her legacy, last year our Bureau of Justice Assistance awarded 60 grants totaling almost \$18 million to fund drug courts.

We're also supporting the development and expansion of juvenile and family drug courts. Young drug-involved offenders can really benefit from the treatment, support, and accountability that drug courts provide, and families where children live with substance abusing parents can begin the process of stabilization through the drug court model.

I'm pleased the President's budget to Congress requests \$44 million to continue supporting drug courts and other problem-solving courts modeled on drug court principles.

Drug courts are among a growing number of evidence-based practices now available to justice system professionals. Our role at the Office of Justice Programs is to get this information out to the field in a way that can be used. Through an agency-wide effort called our Evidence Integration Initiative – or E2I, as we refer to it – we're working to help practitioners and policymakers understand what has been shown to work and, just as important, to help them adapt it to their own public safety challenges.

The cornerstone of E2I is a "what works" Web site called CrimeSolutions.gov, which now has more than 250 evidence-based programs identified in an online and easily

accessible database. And each program comes with a rating – “effective,” “promising,” or showing “no results.”

Another key piece of E2I is what we call the OJP Diagnostic Center. This is a “one-stop” crime consultation service for state, local, and tribal policymakers to help them identify and implement evidence-based public safety strategies. The idea is to help assess community strengths and challenges, and match those with evidence-based interventions.

These two resources, CrimeSolutions.gov and the Diagnostic Center, are key elements of our evidence-based strategy, and I think they will help the criminal and juvenile justice fields become better consumers of research, data, and other forms of evidence.

I think we’re on a very promising path, one that will lead toward a better informed and more effective criminal justice system in America. We’ve already gathered incredible momentum. We’re becoming smarter about how we administer justice and deal with our nation’s public safety problems. We need to keep building on that momentum, supporting treatment and supervision alternatives that hold offenders accountable, applying evidence-based strategies to crime and delinquency, and leveraging our resources – across disciplines and across levels of government – to prevent and reduce violence in our communities.

We’re well on our way to making a positive difference. By continuing to work together, I believe we can achieve our goal of a justice system that offers solutions to America’s problems.

Thank you for your time, and thank you for all you do to make America’s communities safer.

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