

REMARKS

OF

THE HONORABLE KAROL V. MASON
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

AT THE

“KEEPING KIDS SAFE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN BULLYING
PREVENTION”
THE FEDERAL BULLYING PREVENTION SUMMIT

ON

FRIDAY, AUGUST 15, 2014
WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Deb [Delisle]. I'm delighted to be here and very pleased to join my fellow speakers and so many other distinguished guests.

I'd like to say a special "thanks" to Deb and all her colleagues and staff at the Department of Education for their leadership of the Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention Steering Committee. This has been an outstanding partnership across a number of federal agencies, including the Department of Justice, and I'm really proud that my office – the Office of Justice Programs – has been part of its work.

I'm very pleased to be here representing the Department of Justice, along with my colleagues from across OJP – including Bob Listenbee, the Administrator of our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, who will be part of a federal panel later today. This is an excellent opportunity to talk about our commitment to addressing the link between bullying and life outcomes for our young people, particularly in achieving academic success and avoiding involvement with the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

We know through research conducted by the National Center for School Engagement that bullying adversely affects school attendance, and we know generally that truancy and dropping out of school are risk factors for involvement in the juvenile justice system. We also know that kids who are exposed to violence are more likely to experience a host of problems, ranging from truancy and poor academic performance to depression and later delinquency and criminality. Since more than 60 percent of American children encounter some form of violence, either directly or indirectly, we're not just talking about a small sub-group of young people.

This is a tremendous concern for us in the Department of Justice, and for the Attorney General personally. Four years ago, he launched the Defending Childhood Initiative to deal with the problem of children exposed to bullying and other forms of violence. As part of that initiative, we're funding eight demonstration sites across the country that are using evidence-based strategies to tackle these challenges. Six of the sites have incorporated an anti-bullying component. One great example is the Grand Forks, North Dakota effort, where more than 10,000 youth have been reached through programs like AI's Pals, which targets pre-schoolers, and Friendships that Work, aimed at fifth- to eighth-graders, as well as other efforts to combat bullying.

We're making a special effort to deal with the challenges facing American Indian and Alaska Native children exposed to violence. A national task force appointed by the Attorney General spent the last year traveling the country, holding hearings to find out how we can address the many violence-related problems faced by native children.

Under Attorney General Holder's leadership, the Department is also playing a leading role – with the Department of Education – in the Supportive School Discipline Initiative, which is designed to foster safe and supportive school climates and to keep kids on the road to academic success and out of the school-to-prison pipeline.

Our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention funded the development of NetSmartz, an online safety program for kids run by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, which teaches them how to deal with cyberbullying and other online threats. Many of the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces across the country that we support are working to raise awareness of the problem. And a number of OJJDP's other programs address bullying by working to increase protective factors and create safe climates in schools and homes.

On top of the training, awareness, and funding we provide, we're supporting research so that we can better understand what works to prevent bullying and ameliorate the impact on its victims. As part of Defending Childhood, our National Institute of Justice launched a program of research focused on children exposed to violence, with a focus on cyberbullying. And as part of its violence against women research program, NIJ has supported studies examining the relationship between bullying and teen dating violence. Under a new Comprehensive School Safety Initiative launched just this year, NIJ is also making funding available for research and evaluation projects and to test models that address a host of school safety issues, including bullying.

Finally, I'm pleased to announce a new video resource titled "Bullying, Harassment, and Civil Rights: An Overview of School Districts' Federal Obligation to Respond to Harassment." This video has been developed as part of a collaboration among the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services. The video explains schools' obligation to respond to bullying and harassment under federal civil rights laws. It provides helpful information for schools to ensure that students learn in safe, healthy, and nondiscriminatory climates. We hope that it will be shared widely so that schools are better informed of their responsibilities and students understand their rights. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan provides opening comments, and I join my colleague Catherine Lhamon, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education, to discuss what schools can and must do in response to bullying and harassment by other students.

We are excited that this video also features narration by Morgan Freeman. Schools have a responsibility to create safe learning environments for all students. When bullying or harassment is based on a protected class and creates a hostile environment, or when bullying or harassment of a student with a disability affects that student's ability to receive a free appropriate public education, schools have an obligation under federal civil rights laws to take action. I encourage you to use the resources identified in this video to support your own efforts to address harassment and help us all build safe, supportive learning environments for our nation's youth. We'll show a clip of the video in just a moment. To watch the full version and to learn more, please visit www.stopbullying.gov.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that we're joined in all our efforts by our partners in the Office on Violence Against Women, the COPS Office, and the Department's Civil Rights Division, who also serve on the Federal Partners Steering

Committee. I know their leadership and staff are strongly committed to using their resources to prevent bullying and keep young people safe from harm.

There's no question that the consequences of bullying – whether it takes the form of physical attacks or online harassment – are serious, sometimes deadly. Bullying threatens immediate safety, and it can also jeopardize a young person's future – by causing psychological problems, by interfering with academic progress, and by potentially leading to involvement with the justice system.

We have an obligation to dedicate our resources and our talents to stopping bullying behaviors. We must continue the work that we've started and build on the successes that so many of you have helped make possible. And we must do it together. We owe it to our children.

Thank you for your time, and for all that you do for our kids.

I think we now have a short clip of the video. That will be followed by remarks from Pam Hyde, Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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