

REMARKS

OF

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

AT THE

STATE VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT ADMINISTRATORS CONFERENCE

ON

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2014  
BOSTON, MA

Thank you, Joye [Frost], for those kind words. I'm delighted to join all of you here in Boston. I want to especially thank Deputy Attorney General Calkins and Liam Lowney for being with us today, for welcoming us to their state, and for their leadership on behalf of the safety of the citizens of Massachusetts.

I'd like to thank Rob Gallup and Gene McCleskey and their organizations for bringing us together for this important conference and for their visionary leadership and their close partnership with the Office of Justice Programs. I also want to thank Joye and her wonderful staff for their role in this conference, but more importantly, for the outstanding work they do every day to make sure federal resources are used as effectively as possible to meet the needs of America's crime victims.

And speaking of federal resources, I'm very happy that we have with us today representation from the White House Office of Management and Budget. Julie Dingley is the OMB analyst responsible for programs and activities touching on the budgets of OJP, and she's been a terrific partner. It says a great deal about this Administration's commitment to crime victims that she was able to join us today. Welcome, Julie.

And I want to thank all of you, the victim assistance and compensation administrators, for your leadership in your states and for helping to set the course for victim services in our country. So much of what we do at the Office of Justice Programs and the Department of Justice depends on the perspectives and insights you provide.

Because the vast majority of our victim funding goes to and through the states, your decisions determine our success in meeting the needs of crime victims, not just in your states, but in all the states and territories. That's why I'm very pleased that Joye has made a strong effort to reach out to each and every one of you to find out how we can strengthen our connection with states and work together to address the needs you've identified.

I'm delighted that she's holding quarterly meetings with state administrators to hear about your challenges and concerns. She and her staff are publishing a newsletter highlighting promising programs, legislative and policy news, and activities of interest as a way of keeping victim assistance and compensation professionals connected. And under her direction, the OVC Training and Technical Assistance Center now has a staff member dedicated to each state so that OVC can keep on top of the challenges facing the field. Joye and her team have put you front and center because she believes – and I believe – that you hold the key to progress in meeting the needs of crime victims across the country.

I want to use our relationship to bolster services for crime victims, because we regard victim services as a cornerstone of our mission at OJP. And it's well worth noting that this commitment to victims and victim services does not end in OJP. It runs through the entire Department and is shared by the Attorney General himself. Eric Holder has shown time and again, in words and in action, that he stands with victims and those who serve them. It's a commitment that goes back to his days as U.S. Attorney. It was no

surprise last August when he delivered his speech to the American Bar Association announcing his “Smart on Crime” initiative – one of the seminal speeches of his tenure – that he talked about OVC’s Vision 21 Initiative and the need to marshal our resources in an effort to extend the reach of victim services.

We’re fortunate to have an Attorney General with this kind of dedication to crime victims. It’s the kind of leadership we need if we hope to realize the goal of ensuring that assistance is available and accessible to all crime victims.

But as we meet here today, we are still a long way from reaching that goal. Most victims never see any type of assistance, and not all communities have a place where victims can go for support. In many cases, victims don’t even come to the attention of the authorities. Almost half of violent crime victims never report to law enforcement. For all the good work we’ve done collectively, we still have much more to do.

This gap in services is what led Joye to launch the effort that led to OVC’s Vision 21 Initiative. I think you’re all familiar with Vision 21. Its goal is to figure out how we can best meet the enduring and the emerging challenges confronting victim services and maximize the impact of our resources.

After consulting with experts across the country, OVC determined that there are a number of steps we can take to improve our response to victims, from better strategic planning to expanding our use of technology. One very important step – and an area in which all of you can play a major role – is in closing the research gap in the victims field and using data to drive our work.

We’ve accumulated a good deal of knowledge about crime and victimization over the years, thanks in large part to our Bureau of Justice Statistics and National Institute of Justice. But we’re still not where we need to be in our understanding of the scope and nature of victimization.

I’m very pleased that Joye and her counterpart in the Bureau of Justice Statistics – Bill Sabol – have been working together to identify ways to expand our data-gathering capacity so that we capture information that will help state-level decision-makers and professionals in the field. With money transferred from OVC, Bill and his staff are undertaking the National Survey of Victim Service Organizations. This will be the first-ever national effort to capture detailed information on the number, characteristics, and capacity of victim serving organizations in the United States. The NSVSO, as we call it, will complement the National Crime Victimization Survey, which provides victim accounts of criminal incidents. BJS is also expanding its portfolio of work in victim services by exploring, for example, how to use the National Crime Victimization Survey to obtain data on victim use of and satisfaction with services. You’ll hear more about this from Bill later today.

BJS is also working on a project called the National Crime Statistics Exchange, or NCS-X, as we call it. The goal is to build a statistical system that can generate detailed

national estimates of the volume and characteristics of crimes known to law enforcement; and to return meaningful analytic information to law enforcement, policymakers, and professionals like you who have to make tough funding decisions every year. This is a groundbreaking effort that will change the way we understand crime in this country, and it will give us valuable information that will inform our planning and programming.

Another key goal of Vision 21 is expanding the capacity of service organizations to meet the needs of all victims with whom they come into contact. Here the states can – and should – lead the way.

This spring, OVC issued a solicitation under the auspices of Vision 21 to fund networks to provide holistic legal assistance to crime victims. Only states were eligible for this program, and we anticipate making three awards of up to \$500,000 each before the end of September.

I'm also very pleased that OVC is supporting innovation, not only in victim assistance, but in compensation efforts. Last year, we made three awards to states to enhance access to victim compensation. In Vermont, for example, officials are improving outreach to deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals and other underserved victims. California is targeting populations that have traditionally been overlooked, like human trafficking victims, youth, disabled individuals, and immigrant communities. And in Iowa, officials are concentrating efforts on the ordering and collection of restitution.

Vision 21 is a vital part of our efforts at the Office of Justice Programs to reach underserved populations, particularly young minorities who, we often forget, are victimized at disproportionate rates. African American males between the ages of 16 and 19 have the highest rate of violent victimization of any race and any age group.

As a result of Vision 21, OVC is supporting Drexel University to provide trauma-informed care in hospital settings. And we are funding the Hidden Victims Project in Brooklyn, which is designed to steer high-risk youth away from violence and other harmful choices and toward healthy lifestyles. These programs are helping us make inroads in meeting the needs of young people who encounter violence on a daily basis. And I hope we can count on you to exercise your leadership at the state level in expanding services for this population.

And even as we work to meet the needs of victims in urban neighborhoods, we're reaching out to victims in rural areas, particularly tribal communities. Those of you in states with tribal lands know how difficult it can be for American Indian and Alaska Native victims to gain access to services. We're trying to close those gaps and to make native victims aware of the resources available to them.

I'm impressed by the progress being made in Oklahoma as a result of the State Tribal Liaison Demonstration Program there. With funding from OVC, the state administering agency – the Oklahoma District Attorney's Council – hired a tribal member as a liaison with tribes and has increased communication with the 38 federally

recognized tribes in the state. And as part of Vision 21, OVC will make up to three awards this year to tribal organizations to develop a victim-centered community wellness framework that offers a full range of intervention, treatment, and other resources aimed at meeting the long-term needs of victims and survivors.

And there's another group of victims and survivors that we have been working hard to support. This city knows as well as any the terrible toll that a single incident of mass violence takes. In the space of just 13 seconds last April, three lives were lost, scores of people suffered catastrophic injuries that will require life-long medical attention, and countless others experienced a trauma that they will never forget.

The people of Boston have shown incredible resiliency in the aftermath of the bombings, and thanks to the staff of the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance, the victims and survivors have received much-needed help. I'm proud that OVC, through its Antiterrorism and Emergency Assistance Program, has been part of the response. OVC staff worked closely with the state and with the FBI's Office of Victim Assistance to make sure that critical support was provided, both in the immediate aftermath and in the days, weeks, and months that followed. In January this year, we awarded the state more than \$8.3 million to ensure that victims, family members, and first responders continue to receive needed assistance.

We've also learned important lessons about the need for states and communities to prepare for crimes of mass violence. Even before the bombings last year, we had begun developing a toolkit to provide information to help jurisdictions better plan for these incidents, bearing in mind that no community can be fully prepared for tragedy and trauma on that scale. When it becomes available this fall, it will reflect the latest information we have about the needs of victims of these crimes, as well as best practices in responding.

We're applying those lessons to our own policies and practices. One way we're doing this is by working to ensure that red tape doesn't become an obstacle to helping victims and survivors. We've seen in the wake of the Boston bombings and the shootings in Newtown, Connecticut that expenses such as travel of family members to care for wounded victims or mental health coverage for first responders aren't covered uniformly across the states. This lack of uniformity should never be a reason for us not to help.

OVC is updating the Antiterrorism and Emergency Assistance Program guidelines to allow us to provide funding to compensation programs for expenses that are not allowable under their states' compensation statutes. This will help alleviate the financial burden on victims and their loved ones and give them the support they need to begin their healing. The revised guidelines are out for public comment now.

Our work with the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance is illustrative of the work we're doing with all the states and territories, and it underscores how much we depend on all of you to ensure that federal resources are meeting the needs of victims across the country.

Your partnership and your feedback have been vital to helping us meet our mission of lifting up crime victims and ensuring that they see justice. We're proud that we can support you in your work. I look forward to building on our progress and to continuing to work toward the day when all crime victims get the help and support they need and deserve.

Thank you.

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