

REMARKS

OF

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

AT THE

VIOLENCE REDUCTION NETWORK SUMMIT

ON

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2014
WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Todd [Jones]. And my thanks to you and your staff for hosting this summit. I'm very pleased to join you and the Attorney General, as well as my distinguished Justice Department colleagues and so many local leaders, for today's launch of the Violence Reduction Network.

I'd like to extend a special welcome to the Members of Congress and their staff who are with us – Senator Booker, Senator Coons, Senator Durbin, Congresswoman Kelly, and Congresswoman Lee. We're delighted to have you here today. And a warm welcome to all our guests from out of town: the mayors, deputy mayors, police chiefs, prosecutors, and officials from the ATF, FBI, DEA, and Marshals field offices – and of course, our United States Attorneys and their staff. We are very glad that you've accepted our invitation to join the Violence Reduction Network and grateful for your commitment to the safety of the citizens of your communities.

We're excited that you've agreed to be part of this collaboration with the Department of Justice, and we appreciate that you've all made room for us at the table. This is an opportunity for us to pool our resources and to find out what we can achieve when we concentrate our efforts and expertise on our most pressing public safety challenges.

Our goals today, and over the next three days, are to bring together all the law enforcement stakeholders from each of the five Network sites – Camden, New Jersey; Chicago, Illinois; Detroit, Michigan; Oakland and Richmond, California; and Wilmington, Delaware – and identify your toughest violence-related challenges, determine what resources are available to meet those challenges, and figure out how we can close the gaps by tapping our knowledge of what works.

We want to pay particular attention to how we can use evidence-based approaches to improve our response. Through his Smart on Crime Initiative, the Attorney General has led the Department to a greater reliance on science and data in preventing and reducing crime. The aim of the Violence Reduction Network is to make that evidence-based approach the bedrock principle of our crime-fighting strategies.

While you are here, we hope to find out what steps we need to take to leverage our resources to reduce violence in your cities. And when I say "our resources," I'm talking especially about what we can do in my office, the Office of Justice Programs. OJP exists to support local law enforcement and criminal justice agencies, and we have a wealth of training, technical assistance, information, and other resources to help you, much of it available through our Bureau of Justice Assistance.

We want to know not just about the gaps you're seeing locally, but what's missing from us at the federal level. Does our training and technical assistance address your communities' needs? Do our grant programs complement your violence reduction strategies? What do you need from the Department of Justice that will help you do your jobs most effectively? We hope that you'll give our representatives feedback as you meet with them over the next three days, and throughout this initiative.

A little later, BJA's Deputy Director, Kristen Mahoney, will tell you more about the objectives of the Violence Reduction Network and what we hope to achieve during this summit and throughout the course of the initiative. One thing I do want to say is that I encourage you – strongly encourage you – to see the Department not only as a source of training and assistance, but as an ally in your work.

The Department of Justice has a significant enforcement presence in each of your cities, which means we are invested in your crime-fighting efforts. And we're very pleased that this work is paying off. Some of you are seeing reductions in the violent crime rate, and you're building on that momentum. We hope the Network will serve as the forum for a robust exchange of ideas, information, and resources that will help you move your activities – and your successes – to the next level.

It's worth saying that this summit is not a grab-and-go meeting. This is just the beginning of a two-year commitment to help you deliver on your plans to reduce violent crime in your cities. The Office of Justice Programs and our partners across the Department of Justice will be working through the strategic site liaisons to make sure you have the tools and the access you need to reach your goals. We hope that you, in turn, will continue to engage with us and help us help you.

Before I introduce the Attorney General, I'd like to recognize the two people most responsible for getting the Violence Reduction Network up and running: Kristie Brackens of our Bureau of Justice Assistance and Michael Seelman, who is on loan to BJA from the FBI. Kristie and Michael are Co-Directors of the Network, and they are the ones who've done the work to bring us all together. Thank you, Kristie and Michael.

I also want to thank Kristen Mahoney for acting as the Network's CEO and for doing so much to give it focus and energy. We appreciate your leadership and vision, Kristen. And finally, my thanks and gratitude to BJA's Director, Denise O'Donnell. Denise came to OJP having served as a United States Attorney and the Deputy Secretary for Public Safety in New York, and she has used every bit of the knowledge and experience gained from those posts to strengthen the Department's relationship with state and local law enforcement. Thank you, Denise.

Of course, the person in the Department most responsible for strengthening ties to communities is the man who leads us, Attorney General Eric Holder.

As a former U.S. Attorney and superior court judge, he is very much attuned to the public safety needs of communities and he has worked hard, throughout his career, to make sure those communities have the support they need to solve local crime problems. As Attorney General, he has been one of the biggest advocates of an evidence-based approach to crime and violence, and under his leadership and direction, the Department has engaged in unprecedented work to expand knowledge about what works and to make that information available to the people who need it most.

He also has a strong personal commitment to state and local law enforcement and has fought hard to give them the tools, resources, and federal funding they need to do their jobs effectively and safely.

It's an honor to work for someone of his strong convictions – who cares so deeply about the safety and health of our communities – and it's a privilege to introduce him today. Please welcome Attorney General Eric Holder.

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