

REMARKS

OF

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OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

AT THE

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE SESSION
AT THE
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE
ANNUAL CONFERENCE

ON

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ORLANDO, FL

Thank you, Vince [Talucci]. I'm very pleased to be here, especially after having to abort last year's session due to the government shutdown. I'm delighted that we were spared the same headaches this year.

I'd like to begin by expressing my tremendous appreciation to Vince and the International Association of Chiefs of Police for working with our National Institute of Justice to make this session possible. IACP has been very generous in giving us such a substantial amount of time. It's a testament to their visionary leadership that they've made space available for these discussions around science. I'd also like to thank John Firman for his efforts, and for his long-time commitment to ensuring that the latest research is infused in police practice. John, thank you.

I also want to say how much I appreciate, and how very much my agency values, IACP as a partner in serving the law enforcement community. Our partnership goes back many years, and we share a vital mission – namely, to help our nation's law enforcement leaders and officers do their jobs as effectively and as safely as possible.

I also want to thank everyone here for your interest in the scientific mission and activities of my agency, the Office of Justice Programs, and of the Department of Justice as a whole. I know most of you are law enforcement practitioners, and I find it commendable that you have taken an active interest in applying science to the work that you do. You are helping us live up to our hopes for evidence-based policing across the United States.

And to those among you who are researchers and scientists, I want to thank you for your dedication to improving our criminal and juvenile justice systems. Your work – always so important – has become even more critical in recent years.

I'd like to make one more acknowledgement. My distinguished predecessor as Assistant Attorney General, Laurie Robinson, will be moderating a panel at today's session. Laurie's contributions to advancing science at OJP, and across the criminal and juvenile justice fields, are incalculable.

She laid the groundwork for so much that the Department of Justice has been able to accomplish in promoting evidence-based practices, exemplified by her brainchild, CrimeSolutions.gov. I think she'd be proud to see how much CrimeSolutions.gov has grown – it now includes more than 320 programs and practices, all with ratings for effectiveness. Laurie has left a solid legacy, and one that I know will outlive this Administration.

When I was appointed Assistant Attorney General, I resolved to continue what Laurie and Mary Lou Leary had begun, which was to create a culture of science across OJP and the Department of Justice. And I see this scientific mission as permeating the entire agency.

While NIJ is dedicated to advancing science, I believe that all our program offices – the ones that provide funding and other support for law enforcement, victim services, juvenile justice, and sex offender management programs – must embrace science as part of their work. This will continue to be a top priority of mine. I firmly believe that OJP has a distinct and very important science mission, and that mission includes ensuring that law enforcement officers have access to the best possible research products, technology, and equipment to do their jobs safely and effectively.

NIJ has led the way, furthering research on “hot spots” and crime mapping, developing state-of-the-art body armor and maintaining a body armor testing program, supporting research to improve officer safety, and organizing high-level discussions through the Harvard Executive Sessions to encourage ground-breaking thought on issues like police discipline and police professionalism. In fact, the Executive Session on Policing just finished up six years of work with more than 20 important papers authored by police chiefs and researchers. I understand there’s a session here at the IACP conference featuring some of those papers.

NIJ’s work remains on the cutting edge. They’ve just completed a third wave of awards to study the path from radicalization to violent extremism. And just recently, three cities have asked NIJ’s researchers to help them form plans for pilot efforts to combat violent extremism, a program the Attorney General announced earlier this month.

NIJ has partnered with the FBI to look at best practices in addressing the large number of sexual assault kits that have never been submitted to labs. Through an action-research project in Houston and Detroit, NIJ will analyze data about the untested kits, and the FBI’s DNA lab will test evidence and enter eligible profiles into the national DNA database. We expect this work to lead to improved policies and practices for collecting sexual assault evidence.

NIJ is funding two studies of the impact of body-worn cameras on policing, one in the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department and the other by the Los Angeles Police Department. This is a great example of law enforcement agencies opening themselves up to research. I know there were challenges in implementing these studies, and I want to commend and thank both departments for their cooperation. We’re eagerly awaiting the findings.

NIJ’s research is also at the center of our efforts to strengthen police-community relationships. NIJ has funded a number of studies focusing on the impact of procedural justice training programs, the effectiveness of “stop and frisk” police tactics, citizens’ perceptions of the police, and the delivery of police services in their communities, as well as police strategies to build collective efficacy in hot spot areas. This work will only become more critical in the months and years ahead.

I believe one of the defining challenges in public safety is establishing the legitimacy of our criminal and juvenile justice institutions. Two weeks ago, the Attorney General announced a major effort being led by my office in partnership with divisions across the Department of Justice. It's called the National Initiative on Building Community Trust and Justice, and its goal is to help communities address the challenges arising from suspicion and distrust between community members and local justice system agencies.

We're partnering with a renowned group of criminal justice experts from the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Yale University, the Center for Policing Equity at UCLA, and the Urban Institute who have extensive experience working with state and local police departments and communities on these issues. They've accumulated vast knowledge of evidence-based models that they will test, refine, and expand in communities facing an array of challenges stemming from suspicion and distrust. They'll be advised by a national board of law enforcement practitioners and community and faith-based leaders that will work in close collaboration with the Justice Department.

Through this initiative, we will build on pioneering work being done in some of the nation's most challenged areas, and we will open doors to cooperation and trust that will lead to safer neighborhoods and a justice system that inspires the confidence of those it serves. Research funded through the initiative by NIJ will be critical to ensuring success, and the direct and on-going involvement of law enforcement will be critical. I encourage you visit our new website for more information – ojp.gov/communitytrust.htm.

Reaffirming the system's legitimacy also depends on the way its institutions handle mistakes. Major criminal justice errors – whether they're wrongful convictions, premature prisoner releases, or other serious oversights – are rarely the fault of a single individual or even one organization. In most cases, they are the result of complex organizational flaws, which trigger these sentinel events.

NIJ recently released a special report called *Mending Justice* that calls for a non-blaming, all-stakeholder, forward-leaning process that goes beyond disciplining rule-breakers and looks to minimize the risk of similar errors in the future. The report is part of NIJ's Sentinel Events Initiative, which is also supporting pilot programs in three jurisdictions and two research projects at Texas State University and the Vera Institute of Justice. And here again, police departments are front and center in making this research possible.

I believe this approach has tremendous potential to strengthen public trust in the justice system and improve the effectiveness of justice system agencies. Thanks to NIJ's work, we are building a solid foundation of research on which to rest these twin pillars of OJP's mission.

NIJ remains the federal, and national, focal point for criminal justice science. We are extremely fortunate to have a bright and dedicated staff leading these efforts – and we continue to add to the ranks. I want to welcome two new additions: Seri Irazola and Howard Spivak, who are deepening the pool of talent at NIJ. I’m also very pleased that President Obama has announced his intent to appoint Nancy Rodriguez from Arizona State University to become Director of NIJ. I look forward to being able to say more about her selection soon. And I am, of course, grateful to Bill Sabol, who is doing double duty as head of both NIJ and our Bureau of Justice Statistics – and doing a terrific job.

I’m excited about today’s session, and I’m looking forward to hearing about your needs and priorities, and how OJP can best support you. I hope the information being shared today, and the knowledge and ideas that you share with each other, will help you in your work. And I hope we will all come away with an even stronger resolve to make evidence central to our work.

Thank you.

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