

REMARKS
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

OF

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OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

AT THE

OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS
YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION
FALL CONVENING

ON

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2015
BALTIMORE, MD

Thank you, Eugene [Schneeberg]. I'm delighted to be here with you, Melissa [Rogers], and our partners in Baltimore to talk about some of the exciting work we're doing on behalf of our nation's young people. Supporting and protecting youth is a centerpiece of our mission at the Office of Justice Programs, and it's one of my top personal priorities as Assistant Attorney General.

It's wonderful to see so many people from so many parts of the country committed to lifting up our young people and pulling them out of the grip of violence. And it's gratifying to see that what we're doing at the Department of Justice and across the Obama Administration is having an impact in communities throughout the nation.

I've developed a mantra during my time at the Department of Justice, and it goes like this: If we can give our youth the services and support they need; intervene early in situations where they are exposed to violence and trauma; and keep them in school and connected to their families, communities, and faith-based and neighborhood organizations, we are far more likely to keep them out of the justice system and on the path to healthy, productive lives – and we will be better able to ensure the overall safety of our communities.

Safe, healthy kids mean safe, healthy communities. That's part of the philosophy behind the President's *My Brother's Keeper* initiative, which is bringing together federal, local, and private partners to build and extend ladders of opportunity for our youth. My office and the Department of Justice as a whole play a central role by focusing on preventing and reducing violence, improving outcomes in the juvenile justice system, and ensuring that those who are victimized have access to services.

The President and the Department of Justice are focusing so much attention on the intersection of opportunity and safety because we're at a very pivotal moment in the history of crime and justice in our country. On the positive side, crime rates nationally are at historic lows, and there is broad bi-partisan support for reforming our justice system to make it more fair and more effective. At the same time, in too many neighborhoods, trends in crime and violence are running counter to the overall national trend, and in many communities, tensions between justice system agencies and citizens have never been higher. These are areas with high unemployment rates, poor housing, low academic achievement, and – yes – large minority populations.

Young men of color, in particular, are the segment of society most vulnerable to violence, and they're also the group least likely to receive support. So they're bearing a burden of trauma that their still-developing brains and bodies aren't equipped to deal with. And too often, this trauma is resolved in anxiety, depression, psychological and physical health problems, poor school performance, drugs, alcohol – and violence.

A new program launched this year by our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and our Office for Victims of Crime is supporting efforts to plug service gaps and pull these young people out of the cycle of trauma and violence. One of the projects is right here in Baltimore. The city's health department is bringing together

faith-based organizations, health officials, social workers, and community representatives to develop a shooting response protocol and create a plan to raise public awareness about the consequences of victimization. We have similar efforts underway in 11 other cities.

One thing we've learned about combatting violence – and this is something you're all modeling in your work – is that we stand a greater chance of reducing violence when we rely on prevention and intervention, not just enforcement and prosecution. We also know, as each of you has shown, that violence reduction strategies work better when citizens and community stakeholders own the problem and band together to find solutions.

These two elements form the core of the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention. Through the Forum, we're bringing together a broad collaboration of stakeholders – citizens, faith-based and community groups, law enforcement officials, public health professionals, business and philanthropic representatives, and others – and we're working to develop violence prevention strategies tailored to the needs of each community.

Baltimore is one of the 15 Forum sites carrying out plans to reduce violent crime and improve opportunities for youth, and I'm proud that we recently awarded a new grant to support the city's efforts. This new award will focus on steering kids away from delinquency by keeping them engaged in school, which we know is one of the surest ways to keep young people on the path to positive health and productive lives.

And for those young people who do come into the system, we need to make sure they're prepared to return to their communities ready to live crime-free, productive lives. Under the Second Chance Act, we recently awarded \$12.3 million to support services like community supervision and evidence-based substance abuse treatment for youth returning from the justice system.

We're also working to keep incarcerated parents connected with their kids, both for the sake of the children and because we know that family networks are so critical to keeping returning individuals crime-free. More than 2.7 million children in this country have parents behind bars, and one in five youth in custody has or is expecting a child. Under Eugene's leadership, we're focusing much of our reentry work on helping incarcerated parents maintain these connections. Since 2014, we've awarded more than \$5 million in Second Chance Act mentoring grants to strengthen relationships between young fathers and their children, and we've invested an additional \$5 million dollars to connect children with incarcerated parents to supportive, caring mentors.

And finally, we've got to appreciate the role that the juvenile justice system plays in the well-being and safety of our young people. If we don't have a system that meets kids where they are developmentally, the chances of making a positive difference in their lives fall dramatically. Our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is devoting much of its activity to supporting reforms that align with the latest research in developmental psychology and that will make our juvenile justice practices more

effective. Specifically, the Smart on Juvenile Justice program is supporting efforts to curb the number of out-of-home placements and redirect investments to intervention and diversion programs and other alternatives. Early results have been promising.

I'm proud of the work we're engaged in to reduce violence and improve outcomes for our youth, and I'm encouraged to see such a strong display of commitment from our local partners. We know this is tough work, and success won't come quickly. But whether or not you're seeing progress, you should know that you are making a difference – in the safety of your communities, in the integrity of our justice system, and in the lives of all the young people you serve.

Thank you. Now I'll turn it over to my colleague, Melissa Rogers, the Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

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