

REMARKS

OF

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

AT THE

U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS  
WINTER MEETING  
CRIMINAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE MEETING

ON

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WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Mayor Freeman-Wilson. I'm very happy to be here with David Kennedy and my colleague, Ron Davis – and I'm delighted to be part of this conversation with so many of our nation's mayors. My thanks as well to Mayor Cownie and Mayor Gonzalez, and also to Laura Waxman for welcoming me to this discussion.

I appreciate this opportunity to talk about the many ways my office is working to support America's cities. I'm especially pleased because our efforts are matching a top Administration priority with an issue that I know is of central concern to all of you – that is, strengthening our justice system.

As I'm sure you're all well aware, criminal justice reform is at the top of the President's list of goals for the remainder of his term, and I'm proud that my office is helping to lead this work. Our activities span the full range of the justice system and our portfolio is far too extensive to cover in the time I have today, but I'd like to touch on a few resources that I believe will be of interest to everyone here.

First, one of our top priorities is brokering relationships between our justice system partners and the communities they serve. In 2014, we launched our National Initiative on Building Community Trust and Justice, which is a partnership with Ron's office and office's across the Justice Department. The basic idea is to build on what we know about procedural justice, implicit bias, and racial reconciliation and help communities bridge those divides that so often characterize citizen interaction with the justice system.

We have a renowned group of experts – David Kennedy chief among them – who are testing evidence-based models in six pilot sites: Gary, Indiana; Birmingham, Alabama; Fort Worth, Texas; Minneapolis; Pittsburgh; and Stockton, California. We also have an information clearinghouse to provide information and technical assistance, which you can find at [trustandjustice.gov](http://trustandjustice.gov). Our hope is that we'll be able to expand into additional sites in future years.

Another resource we have at your disposal is the OJP Diagnostic Center. The Diagnostic Center coordinates technical assistance from offices across the Justice Department to help cities address local public safety challenges.

It relies on data and evidence both to tackle the immediate problem and to build local capacity. Services are available at no cost to communities – and we've engaged with three dozen to date. As I think Mayor Freeman-Wilson will attest, there are both short- and long-term benefits to this collaboration. I encourage you to visit our website at [OJPDiagnosticCenter.org](http://OJPDiagnosticCenter.org) for information.

Building capacity is a central part of our mission, and we have a number of programs designed to support cities and communities in their public safety efforts. Two that I'm particularly proud of are our Violence Reduction Network and the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention.

The Violence Reduction Network – or VRN, as we call it – coordinates training, enforcement, and technical assistance resources from across the Department of Justice and concentrates those resources in cities facing violent crime challenges. My office, the COPS Office, and the Office on Violence Against Women make training and technical assistance available, and DOJ’s enforcement units – the FBI, DEA, ATF, and Marshals – leverage their assets.

We have a VRN presence in 10 cities at the moment, and we’ll be expanding to 5 more sites in the coming months. Since we launched VRN in September 2014, we’ve seen impressive progress. For example, our site in Detroit is focusing on domestic violence homicides, and they’ve seen a 35 percent drop in just a year. Another site – Wilmington, Delaware – created a specialized homicide investigative unit, and homicide clearance rates went from about 10 percent to more than 40 percent.

Similarly, our National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention is now operational in 15 cities. The Forum brings together stakeholders from across the spectrum to develop and carry out plans aimed at reducing youth violence and expanding opportunities for young people. We’ve had strong buy-in from mayors and I think this federal-local collaboration is really making a difference.

I’ll end with just a general word or two about our other efforts. In line with the President’s push for greater fairness in our justice system, we’re working to make the system more balanced and equitable across the system – not just in context of law enforcement, but also in terms of smarter, more evidence-based pre-trial practices; reducing collateral penalties for the one in four Americans with a criminal record; and curbing the way fees and fines disproportionately penalize the poor and minorities, often for no reasonable public safety purpose.

There’s a lot of work to be done, and there’s a sense of urgency on the part of the President and the administration to get us well down the path to reform. None of this work will be possible without the leadership and advocacy of our mayors, and I look forward to hearing your ideas about how we can partner with one another to better serve the safety of our communities.

Thank you.

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