

REMARKS

OF

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

AT THE

NATIONAL MENTORING SUMMIT

ON

FRIDAY, JANUARY 29, 2016

WASHINGTON, DC

Good morning. I'm delighted to be here, and thrilled to be among so many advocates, researchers, policymakers, and mentors – more than 1,000 of you! It's wonderfully exciting to see this show of commitment on behalf of our kids.

I want to thank our friends at the MENTOR for organizing this summit and for the terrific work they do managing our National Mentoring Resource Center.

It's a privilege to be able to talk, even briefly, about an issue that I care so very deeply about. Our mission at the Office of Justice Programs is centered on improving the fairness and effectiveness of our justice system, and a key part of that is expanding opportunities for our young people – giving them the chance that they all need and deserve to contribute to their communities and achieve their full potential.

To my mind, there's nothing better that we can do for our youth than to ensure that they have the chance to connect with dedicated, energetic, and well-trained mentors. The guidance and direction of a caring and respected adult is the key to keeping a young person on a path of responsible, productive behavior, headed to a bright future.

And this isn't just a matter of opinion – it's a fact, grounded in research. Evaluations of mentoring programs show the difference they can make in young lives – by boosting self-esteem, strengthening relationships with parents and peers, improving school performance, and reducing violence, drug use, and other risky behaviors.

For too many young people, this guidance is missing in their lives. For those kids, I feel passionately that we have a responsibility – at the federal level and at the local level – to get them the support and direction they need.

I'm proud that the Office of Justice Programs has provided strong support for mentoring efforts, through the leadership of Bob Listenbee and his terrific staff in our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Since 2011, we've made more than \$377 million in funding available for local and national mentoring programs and mentoring-related research.

This funding supports a variety of services in communities across the country, including programs aimed at Native American youth, child victims of sex trafficking, children of incarcerated parents, and young incarcerated fathers. If we can reach these youth early on and provide them with the help and the skills they need, we can give them a fresh start and put them on the path to success.

I believe mentoring is about healthy development. It's about greater opportunity – the kind of opportunity that's the hallmark of the President's *My Brother's Keeper* initiative. Mentoring's about second chances and new beginnings – and for many, the first chance they never had. And mentoring's about living up to the ideals of justice, fairness, and possibility that all of you in this room represent.

I commend everyone here for standing up for those principles – and for all the work you do to lift up our nation’s youth.

Thank you.

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