

REMARKS

OF

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

AT THE

SMART SUITE SUMMIT

ON

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ARLINGTON, VA

Thank you, Denise [O'Donnell]. I'm very pleased to join you and our partners from across the country – the Smart Suite grantees, researchers, and public safety leaders from every level of government and every discipline. It's encouraging to see so many people coming together to talk about ways we can marry research and practice to improve the safety of our communities.

And I'm delighted that Deputy Attorney General Yates has made time in her very busy schedule to be here today. Her commitment to a smarter justice system is second to none. We're fortunate to have her helping to lead the Justice Department's work to integrate data and research into practice.

I want to thank Denise and her outstanding team for bringing us all here to share ideas and information, and for the work they do every day to reduce crime and incarceration. The Smart Suite represents something truly innovative and game-changing – the tremendous potential of researcher-practitioner partnerships to improve community safety and transform the way we think about justice. Denise and her staff deserve enormous credit for their forward thinking and for helping to move the criminal justice field toward a greater reliance on research and data.

One of my goals as Assistant Attorney General is to make research integral to our program and policy work throughout the Office of Justice Programs. Over the course of this Administration, we have made excellent progress. We've built up a database of more than 480 evidence-based programs and practices through our "what works" website, CrimeSolutions.gov. Our free technical assistance resource, the OJP Diagnostic Center, has worked with more than 60 jurisdictions, helping them adopt data-driven and research-based practices to address systemic and persistent public safety challenges. And in areas ranging from juvenile justice reform and youth violence prevention to victim assistance and building community trust – across all our program offices – we have relied heavily on evidence to guide our decision-making.

The Smart Suite is a huge part of that effort. And what makes it unique, and so successful, is the way its programs bring researchers and practitioners together to identify challenges and work on solutions.

In some ways, it sounds so simple – devoting the best minds to solving America's public safety problems. But if you think about it, over the course of our history there's really been too little appetite or political will for knowledge-based crime-fighting. Even today, there are those who marginalize, or even ignore, the evidence. We see it in our public debates, with the suggestion by a few that America's cities are almost uniformly unsafe and the claim that we could be riding the crest of a new crime wave – this in spite of the fact that crime rates nationally are at historically low levels.

Now, make no mistake, some cities are experiencing alarming surges in homicides and other forms of violence. And while these surges appear to be concentrated among a few jurisdictions, they are nonetheless serious matters that we must deal with immediately and with every resource we have at our disposal, especially that most

important of assets, data. The challenges represented by these cities call for thoughtful, deliberate, targeted responses, not fear-mongering. This is something we should have learned from the tough-on-crime experiment of the 90s. Our current mass incarceration problem is a lesson in the perils of alarmism.

The Smart Suite is a corrective to policymaking-by-instinct. It places knowledge ahead of gut reaction, and it considers what's best for the long term over what simply feels right. We've seen some real successes as a result.

In New Haven, Connecticut, for example – under the Smart Policing Initiative – police worked with Dr. Chris Sedelmaier from the University of New Haven to design an innovative approach to problem-oriented policing and foot patrols. Their partnership yielded a 50 percent reduction in violent crime and a 30 percent reduction in overall crime in the targeted neighborhood.

And in Corning, California – one of the sites under the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program – an impressive cross-sector coalition of local, state, and tribal organizations has worked to target crime hot spots, promote neighborhood revitalization, and improve youth outcomes through evidence-based diversion and prevention programs. The city has seen a 30 percent decrease in violent crime since the beginning of last year.

These successes are no accident. They happened because of a commitment to smart, sustainable public safety strategies grounded in data and research. They happened because these programs – your programs – are built around what works.

Our President, our Attorney General, and our Deputy Attorney General understand the value of evidence in advancing an effective justice system. They know that, unless we can show measurable results, the gains we make today may be forgotten by policymakers tomorrow.

Thanks to the Smart Suite programs and other like-minded efforts, we've made considerable advances in evidence-based criminal justice approaches. But, as President Obama has pointed out, our criminal justice still isn't as smart as it should be. Declining crime and incarceration rates are a sign that something is working, but there are too many areas of the system that stand improvement. Our prisons and jails are still far too full. People of color – black males especially – are still greatly over-represented in our corrections systems, though that, too, is improving. And the poor continue to be dragged deeper into the system, often by nothing more than their indigence.

As the President rightly points out, we still have work to do. That's why he has laid out a vision for reform. Reform, he says, needs to happen “in three places – in the community, in the courtroom, and in the cellblock.” In other words, from the front end to the back end of the system, from before justice system involvement to beyond it.

First, we need to reduce the number of people from the community who enter the system in the first place. That means investing in opportunities for those at risk of justice system involvement, including our young people.

Smarter pretrial practices should also be part of the response. A study by our Bureau of Justice Statistics of felony defendants in the nation's 75 largest counties found that more than a third of pretrial detainees are in jail because they're unable to post bail. And we know that very few jurisdictions – less than 10 percent – use validated risk assessments. BJA's Smart Pretrial Demonstration Initiative is supporting three sites – in Denver; Yakima County, Washington; and the state of Delaware – to apply risk assessment and evidence-based supervision strategies. Our goal is to find out how we can expand these risk-based approaches.

Second, we need to open up alternatives like drug and other problem-solving courts for those who do come into contact with the system. And we need to make sure that defendants – all defendants – get the quality representation they need and to which they are entitled by our Constitution.

In New York City; Alameda County, California; and the states of Kentucky, Texas, and Wisconsin, BJA's Smart Defense Initiative is supporting demonstration programs designed to ensure quality access to justice. In Alameda County, for example, the public defender's office is working with researchers at Impact Justice to protect the due process rights of defendants in the pre-arraignment stage.

On the other side of the bar, prosecutors' offices from King's County, New York, to San Francisco are developing diversion programs and other innovative approaches as part of the Smart Prosecution Initiative. The St. Louis Circuit Attorney's Office, for instance, is working with the police, courts, probation and parole agencies, and researchers at Arizona State and St. Louis universities on a gun diversion program targeting felony offenders.

The third step in reform is to ensure that the process of moving from the courtroom to the corrections system, and back out into the community, is smart and fair. Under its Justice Reinvestment Initiative, BJA and its partners have worked with a number of states to re-allocate funds from costly prison-building projects to community supervision and other evidence-based options.

Improving supervision success rates is a big part of the Smart Suite's goals. The Smart Supervision Program has supported development of evidence-based probation and parole strategies in 29 sites, all aimed at improving multidisciplinary collaboration and reducing recidivism.

Reform must reach inside and extend beyond our corrections system. We need to make sure that people who have had contact with the justice system are able to integrate back into their communities. BJA's Second Chance Act Reentry Demonstration program is a pillar of the Smart Suite and a linchpin of this Administration's public safety

approach. All told, since 2009 we've awarded almost 750 Second Chance grants, totaling more than \$400 million, to support reentry programs in communities throughout the country. And we'll be announcing more awards in the coming weeks.

The Attorney General and Deputy Attorney General are huge champions of the Second Chance Act and of reentry programming. Attorney General Lynch and the Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, Cecilia Muñoz, co-chair the Federal Interagency Reentry Council, which was formally established by the President earlier this year. There are more than 20 cabinet-level officials and agency leaders who make up the Reentry Council, and it's remarkable to see the level of collaboration that takes place. Council agencies have been able to push through a number of significant programs and policy changes – from Pell grant funding that opens postsecondary educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals to ban the box initiatives that give returning citizens greater access to jobs.

And we're mindful that evidence-based programming should extend to crime victims, as well. Our Office for Victims of Crime, through its Vision 21 initiative, is helping to guide the victims field to greater reliance on data, research, and technology. Thanks to partnerships with researchers and statisticians, we're learning more and more about the gaps that exist in victim services and how we can use state-of-the-art methods and tools to plug those gaps.

Finally, the goal of evidence-based programming and policymaking isn't just to achieve a more efficient system of justice, but to create a system that is both fair and deserving of public confidence. Research in procedural justice tells us that the manner in which we enforce the law heavily determines how successful we can be in keeping our communities safe.

Two years ago, we launched the National Initiative on Building Community Trust and Justice to help cities address implicit bias and historical tension and to advance procedural justice-informed methods. You only need to read or watch the news to understand how deeply divided some communities are, but we've seen that progress is possible, even in cities with long histories of discord and racial strife. The Smart Suite programs are playing a big part in advancing these approaches and moving our country forward.

The Smart Suite is key to the President's vision of a stronger justice system, one that keeps us safe, neutralizes bias, and reflects our highest principles. These are goals we all share, and reaching them depends on our ability to wed science with practice.

There are just a few months left in this Administration, and while I'm hopeful that the next Administration, and the ones that follow, will keep faith with our evidence-minded approach, I hope to see us move as far down the path as possible before we exit.

Each of you has helped to lay the foundation for a truly knowledge-based and data-driven justice system, and we can already see the structure rising. I hope that you

will continue your pathbreaking work, that you will keep making evidence the guidepost in your decision-making, and that you will help lead us into a new era of public safety – one in which we measure progress not by arrests, or convictions, or long prison sentences, but by the confidence we engender and the peace we secure.

I'm excited about what lies ahead, and I thank you all for the promising future you are helping lead us toward.

It's now my great pleasure and privilege to introduce our next speaker.

From early in her career, Sally Yates has been known as someone who is both tough and fair. As a career prosecutor, she believes in holding people accountable for their actions, but doing so in a way that is both fair and smart.

She has carried that commitment into her service as the second ranking official in the United States Department of Justice. She's made it clear that knowledge and data should be at the center of our policies, and she's been a strong supporter of OJP's efforts to integrate research into practice. It's an honor to have her with us today. Please join me in welcoming Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates.

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