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**Statement on the Commemoration of the Tragedy at Columbine High School  
from U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley,  
U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna E. Shalala, and  
U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno**

On April 20, in public ceremonies and private moments of reflection, we join all Americans in honoring those who lost their lives at Columbine High School. As we remember the victims, our thoughts and prayers will be with their families and the Columbine community. We are reminded that life is precious and that all Americans share the responsibility for the safety, health, and well being of every child in our nation, and to foster healthy youth development.

This is also an appropriate time to recognize the hard work of parents, law enforcement officials, mental health experts, school leaders, and teachers who have been successful this past year in preventing violence in schools. Their success stems from their commitment to listen to young people, encourage good citizenship among students, and do everything possible to keep weapons away from our children.

Statistics tell us that America's schools, where children spend up to eight hours a day, are safer than other environments in which children find themselves. But incidents and commemorations of school violence focus our attention on how important it is for Americans to continue our work to make schools and other environments safe for children to learn and thrive.

The U.S. Departments of Education (ED), Health and Human Services (HHS), and Justice (DOJ) have pooled our resources, and communities are receiving unprecedented federal support to reduce youth violence, and promote healthy development. With the support of the Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative, communities are giving troubled children the help they need, strengthening local law enforcement, and establishing greater connections among adults, schools, and students. This year, we will continue to work toward smaller classes in smaller schools and safe after-school programs. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Mental Health Services (within HHS) will soon announce the availability of \$6 million in grants to States, Territories, and Native American Tribal Governments to support coalitions to prevent violence.

Later this month, ED and DOJ will release *Safeguarding of Children: An Action Guide*, a joint effort to make sure that every school in the nation has a comprehensive violence prevention plan in place. Research shows that violence prevention strategies that build on children's strengths and promote healthy development produce better results and are more cost-effective than measures that are strictly punitive.

By themselves, these initiatives will not eliminate violence by children. But strong federal support can help communities make incidences of violence rare and allow our country to live up to our most basic obligation: protecting our children.

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