

REMARKS

OF

**MARY LOU LEARY
ACTING ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS**

AT THE

NATIONAL MISSING CHILDREN'S DAY CEREMONY

ON

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 23, 2012
WASHINGTON, DC**

Thank you, Mel. I'm very pleased – and honored – to be here to help commemorate National Missing Children's Day and to help recognize several extraordinary individuals for their service to our nation's children.

I'm delighted that the Deputy Attorney General is with us to present the awards. He has been a huge supporter of our work to respond to missing and exploited children, and it's an honor to have him here today.

I'm also glad to see our partner and good friend, Ernie Allen – and I'm delighted to welcome Ms. Pointer, who has a powerful story to tell. I know we all look forward to hearing her speak a little later.

And I want to welcome back Ron Laney, who for many years was the face of the Department's work on behalf of missing and exploited children. Sadly, he retired last year, but as you can see, he will always be an advocate for our young people. It's nice to see you again, Ron.

Finally, let me thank Mel and her terrific staff for bringing us together today and for the work their office does every day to make America a better place for its children.

I'll have the pleasure in a few moments of joining the Deputy Attorney General and Mel in presenting this year's awards, but I want to take this opportunity not only to congratulate our honorees for their extraordinary work, but also to thank all of you – everyone here – for your commitment to finding missing, abducted, and exploited children. Whether you're a law enforcement officer who responds to calls from distressed parents, an advocate who counsels and supports kids and their families, a prosecutor who tries these difficult cases, or a concerned citizen, you have – through your interest and through your actions – helped to make our systems for recovering children more compassionate and more effective.

I've spent much of my career – as a prosecutor, in government, and as head of the National Center for Victims of Crime – working to strengthen our responses to victims of all ages. I never cease to marvel at the incredible devotion and resolve of victim advocates. And I define “advocate” broadly, to mean anyone – no matter the profession – who works with the interests of victims at heart. But those of you who work with child victims deserve special admiration and respect. These cases are so wrenching and so painful. It takes a unique individual to face the horrors exposed by these investigations and pursue these cases through to justice.

We're grateful for everything you do, and we're proud to stand beside you in your work – through the AMBER Alert program, the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces, the work being done by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and all the child protection efforts supported by Mel's office. We consider ourselves your allies, your partners, and your friends, and we will continue to give you the resources you need to find America's missing and exploited children and bring them safely home.

It's my privilege now to introduce our next speaker, someone who's no stranger to this event and someone who's intimately involved in our efforts to respond to missing and exploited children.

After he was sworn in as Deputy Attorney General in January 2011, Jim Cole quickly took ownership of the Department's efforts to fight child exploitation. He's led the work under the Attorney General's National Strategy for Child Exploitation and Interdiction, and he is coordinating activities under the Department's Project Safe Childhood initiative.

He's also been a huge supporter of OJP's work under the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force program. Last month, he addressed the National Law Enforcement Training on Child Exploitation, and he expressed his heartfelt thanks for the courageous work that investigators and advocates do on behalf of our children. Jim Cole truly gets it.

He's with us for the second year in a row – and I'm honored to have him with us. Please join me in welcoming Deputy Attorney General Jim Cole.

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