

REMARKS

OF

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

AT THE

**RECAP: REBUILDING EVERY CITY AROUND PEACE
SUMMIT**

ON

**MONDAY, MARCH 12, 2012
WASHINGTON, DC**

Thank you, Reverend Brown. I'm delighted to be here.

I want to thank you and the entire RECAP coalition for having the foresight and initiative to convene this important summit, and particularly, for bringing together law enforcement and the faith community – two groups that haven't always been on the same page – to address the problem of youth violence.

This issue is one that we in the Department of Justice are very concerned about and working hard to address – and one in which our Attorney General has a deep personal interest. I know he would want me to commend all of you for your commitment and to thank you for your leadership.

From your agenda, I see that I'm joining a distinguished group of speakers – law enforcement leaders, renowned researchers, respected members of the clergy, and authorities from the non-profit sector. It's exciting for me to be joining the likes of Bill Bratton, David Kennedy, Anthony Braga, and Teny Gross, and so many others. I want to thank you for including me among them – and for extending the hand of partnership to the Department of Justice. The problems you're addressing are not problems that we in the federal government alone can fix, and there's no reason to believe we can't make significant progress working together.

I had the privilege yesterday of speaking to a group of mayors and city leaders about some of the very same issues you're addressing here – violence in our urban centers, its toll on racial minorities, and the cycle of crime and displacement it engenders. I believe it's no accident that this subject is on so many people's minds.

Although crime rates are down nationally, some cities – and in particular, certain communities within those cities – are seeing crime move in the opposite direction. For these communities, violence is a daily – and a deadly – fact of life. What's even more troubling is that much of this violence, especially in inner-city African American neighborhoods, is being committed by – and against – our young people.

The stories you hear on the news bear this out, and so do the statistics. It's a tragic fact that black males between the ages of 16 and 19 have the highest rate of violent victimization of any race and any age group. For African American boys and young men between the ages of 10 and 24, homicide is not only the leading cause of death, but it results in more deaths than the next nine leading causes combined.

Urban youth violence is not a one-dimensional tale of remorseless gang predators; it's a complicated and sad story of young people being robbed of their futures. And quite frankly, it's a chronicle of how our social, educational, and justice systems have too often failed our most vulnerable citizens.

The good news is that this is not beyond changing. Despite the inequities and injustices experienced by inner-city youth, crime and violence are not inevitable, and a

future full of hope and opportunity is within reach – if only we have the collective will to help them achieve it.

Both experience and research show that when communities work in partnership – across disciplines and across levels of government – and adopt balanced approaches that rely on the evidence, it’s possible to reduce violence and increase positive outcomes for our youth. This involves breaking down barriers between sectors of the community and building trust between groups who have not always agreed on solutions – or even on the problems – groups like law enforcement and the clergy. In other words, doing exactly what you’re doing here today.

We’re trying to model that behavior at the Department of Justice. Our National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention is working across federal agencies and in partnership with communities to address youth and gang violence in a strategic, comprehensive manner. We’re bringing together citizens, faith-based and community organizations, law enforcement, public health professionals, business and philanthropic leaders, and others to share ideas and explore solutions to these challenges.

Six cities – Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, and Salinas and San Jose, California – have developed and are implementing comprehensive plans aimed at reducing violent crime and improving opportunities for youth. We’ll be announcing four more sites soon. We’ve gotten very high levels of support for this effort – both from within the Administration and from local leaders – and it’s been terrific to see the enthusiasm it’s generated. Community stakeholders are working together to design bold new strategies to tackle their most intractable problems, and the work they’re doing is very promising.

I think it’s time to expand this conversation. On April 2nd and 3rd, we’ll be holding our National Summit on Preventing Youth Violence to talk about how to take this important work to the next level. We’re looking for new partners to work and coordinate with to build on this terrific momentum. There’s so much more we can do, and we owe it to our kids and communities to be sure that we’re working together and leveraging efforts wherever we can.

No one here needs to be told that a comprehensive approach means involving the entire community, engaging residents in setting standards for behavior and enlisting them in solutions to crime and justice problems. This has been the philosophy behind community policing – which I know a number of you helped to pioneer and perfect – and it’s the reason why the community policing model has worked so well in many areas.

At the Department, we’re trying to continue that model of community engagement. Our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention funds an effort called the Community-Based Violence Prevention Demonstration Program that involves citizens in efforts to prevent and reduce crime.

This program supports federal, state, and local partnerships to replicate evidence-based strategies like the Chicago CeaseFire model. Oakland, Denver, Brooklyn, and Washington, D.C. are currently participating, and three new sites – Newark, Boston, and Baltimore – are being added this year. I know Chief Davis and Chief Bealefeld have joined us at this summit, and I'm looking forward to working with them on this important effort. And I want to mention that the President's budget request for the next budget year asks for more money for this program and for several other community-based efforts funded out of my agency.

As we all know, intervention is more effective the earlier it happens. A year-and-a-half ago, the Attorney General announced his Defending Childhood Initiative to address the troubling incidence of children who are exposed to violence in our country. According to our own research, some 60 percent of children are exposed to some form of violence, crime, or abuse, ranging from brief encounters as witnesses to serious violent episodes as victims. Many are victimized more than once. As the Attorney General said himself, children are "living with violence at rates that we, as adults, would never tolerate."

Fortunately, we also know that early intervention can be effective in countering the effects of violence. There are excellent programs out there that have been shown to enhance resiliency and foster healthy development in children. We need to raise awareness of these approaches and find ways to get them into communities where children are at particular risk of violence. That's what we're doing under Defending Childhood – taking the knowledge we've gained from years of experience and research and turning it into workable strategies for preventing and reducing children's exposure to violence.

And, while we want to do everything we can to stop violence from taking root, we must be prepared to address the needs of at-risk youth we encounter through our justice, educational, health, and human services systems.

Frankly, there are many areas where we need to improve our response to these kids. Right now, in many jurisdictions, we have a juvenile justice system that's not only ineffective but harmful because it's not designed for kids. The impact on minority youth is even more pronounced – African American youth make up 16 percent of the overall youth population but more than half the juvenile population arrested for violent crime.

In our schools, kids are being disciplined in ways that are more likely to get them into more trouble later. A recent major study in Texas found that a majority of seventh- to twelfth-grade students are suspended or expelled from school, and a new Department of Education study found that African American students are three-and-a-half times as likely to be suspended or expelled as white students, and more likely to be the targets of on-campus arrests.

Speaking of arrests, when inner city youth come into contact with the system and are put into detention facilities, they often emerge more violent or more traumatized.

And too few incarcerated youth – one study found only 30 percent – return to school or find jobs after they’re released.

And when it comes to young people who are victimized – particularly young black victims – the services and resources simply aren’t there outside of faith organizations and a few dedicated community groups dedicated to at-risk youth.

At my agency, we’re working to address every one of these issues. Our Juvenile Justice Office is engaged with private groups to try to create meaningful reforms in the juvenile justice system that ensure better outcomes for youth and address the problem of disproportionate minority contact.

Through a Supportive School Discipline Project, we’re working with the Department of Education to build consensus on ways to handle problem behaviors to ensure students remain academically engaged and don’t find themselves in the school-to-prison pipeline.

Under the Second Chance Act, we’re supporting more than 370 juvenile and adult reentry programs that are helping returning inmates find jobs, get treatment, and re-establish connections with their families.

And through the Vision 21 Initiative in our Office for Victims of Crime, we’re finding ways to serve the needs of inner city victims, so they find healing without seeking revenge.

We’re also working with groups like the National Alliance for Faith and Justice and Partnership and the National Urban League to support mentoring programs for youth. Proverbs tells us that you “train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” There’s no better way to ensure a young person navigates through life’s narrows than to pair him with a respected adult.

I know tomorrow you’ll hear from my colleague, Eugene Schneeberg, who directs the Department’s Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. The Center is playing a major role in these efforts. Eugene’s a great resource, and I encourage you to share your thoughts and ideas with him.

Finally, I want to mention a resource we have available called CrimeSolutions.gov. This is a “what works” Web site with information on more than 170 criminal and juvenile justice programs, each of which is rated for effectiveness. The idea here is to distill the research and knowledge we have about effective approaches so it can be used by practitioners and policymakers. Also, this spring we’ll be opening a companion Diagnostic Center to help mayors, policymakers, law enforcement, and other local leaders like yourselves identify their public safety needs and implement these evidence-based strategies.

Our goal, through all these efforts, is to find effective, budget-friendly ways to support those young people who need our help the most – and to do it in a collaborative way that maximizes our resources – federal, state, and local. We know times are tight and challenges are tough. Local coffers are shrinking and your responsibilities are growing. But we can't let that deter us – there's too much at stake.

We need each other. Thankfully, as you're showing by your presence here, we have the commitment, experience, and leadership necessary to get the job done. I'm excited by what I see here – a group of visionaries from across the spectrum not only willing to work together but eager to find solutions.

I'm proud to be part of this movement, and I'm privileged to be your partner. Thank you for your good work, and for all you're doing on behalf of our nation's young people.

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