



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF

**THE HONORABLE LAURIE ROBINSON
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME, TERRORISM, AND HOMELAND SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

REGARDING

OVERSIGHT OF THE OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

PRESENTED

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**Statement of
The Honorable Laurie Robinson
Assistant Attorney General
Office of Justice Programs**

**Before the
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
Committee on the Judiciary
United States House of Representatives**

**Regarding Oversight of the Office of Justice Programs
November 2, 2011**

Chairman Sensenbrenner, Ranking Member Scott, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. I am pleased to have this opportunity to discuss the priorities and activities of the Office of Justice Programs (OJP).

In addition to serving as the current Assistant Attorney General of OJP, I have spent a great part of my career involved, both directly and indirectly, in supporting its mission. My first job in criminal justice was working on a grant-funded project from OJP's predecessor agency, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), in the 1970s. In the 1990s, I served as OJP's Assistant Attorney General under President Clinton and Attorney General Reno. Now, I am proud to serve again as head of OJP under President Obama and Attorney General Holder.

OJP's mission is to increase public safety and improve the fair administration of justice across America through innovative leadership and programs. This mission fulfills

two important components of the overall mission of the Department of Justice, namely, providing federal leadership in preventing and controlling crime and ensuring fair and impartial administration of justice for all Americans. At OJP, a key goal is to emphasize close and productive relationships with a broad array of stakeholders in the criminal and juvenile justice fields.

This mutual support, and the resources available from OJP to bolster our criminal and juvenile justice systems and victim services, are of critical importance in these challenging economic times. Across the country, public safety professionals – from law enforcement officers and prosecutors to corrections officials and victim service providers – have been contending with shrinking budgets that threaten their jobs and, ultimately, the peace and security of our homes and communities. To be sure, crime rates nationally are down, but departments across the country have suffered, or are facing, massive layoffs, when homeland security duties and other 21st-century crime challenges are multiplying the responsibilities of law enforcement agencies, when line-of-duty deaths and violent assaults on law enforcement officers are on the rise, and when states are confronted with the difficult dilemma of addressing high prison populations – and corrections costs – while ensuring the safety of citizens.

During my confirmation hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee in October 2009, I articulated three overarching goals for my tenure at OJP to respond to the challenges facing the public safety field. First, I underscored the urgency, particularly in these tight economic times, of supporting state, local, and tribal criminal and juvenile

justice practitioners through *innovative partnerships* based on shared responsibilities.

Second, I emphasized the importance of OJP's role in *expanding our base of knowledge about what works* and, perhaps even more important, in communicating that knowledge to the field in a way that will be most useful. And third, I highlighted *OJP's critical responsibility as a steward of federal funds* and pledged to spare no effort in ensuring accountability of the resources entrusted to us. I am pleased with the progress we have made in each of these areas over the last two years and, in particular, we have aggressively worked, as a high priority, to address waste, fraud, and abuse in our management of government funds.

Building Partnerships

In the current climate of fiscal restraint and uncertainty – when scaled-back budgets jeopardize even the most basic civic functions, and front-line law enforcement officers wonder about the future of their jobs – our state and local partners depend on our leadership and our willingness to support them in their work. Because the need for discipline at the federal level is every bit as great as it is at other levels, we do not have the luxury of coming to the aid of our partners with generous financial resources. Our limited federal funds are best spent helping states, localities, and tribes do what no one state or locality can do on its own. We serve them best when we work with them to study and understand their problems, join with them in brainstorming solutions and developing strategies, coordinate our own response at the federal level – across agencies – and walk beside them as they carry out their work. In other words, we are most effective when we

are a true partner.

Since returning to OJP in 2009, I have sought to broaden our definition of partnership and to expand our base of partners. Within my first months, I held several listening sessions with major stakeholder groups to gauge the issues of greatest concern to the field and to hear feedback on how OJP can best help to address those issues. I also convened a meeting with private foundations involved in crime and justice efforts to explore areas of potential public-private cooperation. Finally, we have been working diligently to coordinate our efforts with other federal agencies whose mission and activities coincide with ours.

One excellent product of our efforts is our National Forum for Youth Violence Prevention. This intergovernmental, cross-disciplinary partnership brings together local and federal leaders, law enforcement officials, educators, public health providers, community and faith-based representatives, parents, and young people to share ideas about effective and cost-efficient ways to prevent youth and gang violence. The Forum's emphasis is on leveraging current spending to make scarce public dollars go further, rather than on new spending. Thus far, six cities – Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, Salinas, and San Jose – have developed and are implementing comprehensive violence prevention plans using multidisciplinary partnerships, data-driven strategies, and a balanced approach aimed at reducing violent crime, improving opportunities for youth, and encouraging innovation. A number of additional cities have asked to participate in the Forum, and the President's budget request includes \$6 million to expand this

innovative network of partnerships from 6 to a total of 18 cities.

Another example is our work in the area of prisoner reentry, which is a major domestic policy priority of the Department of Justice and the Obama Administration. In January, the Attorney General convened the first meeting of the Federal Interagency Reentry Council, which included seven Cabinet-level secretaries, the Commissioner of the Social Security Administration, the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, the Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, the Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and the Chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The purpose of the Council is to coordinate federal reentry efforts in service of three goals: enhancing community safety by reducing recidivism and revictimization; helping those returning from prison to become productive citizens; and saving taxpayer dollars by lowering the direct and collateral costs of incarceration.

OJP is leading the staff-level effort – which now includes 18 different federal agencies – and is making excellent progress on the Council’s goals. Among our accomplishments thus far is the development of a number of reentry “MythBusters,” which clarify existing federal policies that affect formerly incarcerated individuals and their families. The goal of these “MythBusters” is to help correct misinformation in areas such as public housing access, eligibility for benefits, and Medicaid suspension, among many others, that often impedes the ability of former inmates to reintegrate and to turn away from crime.

Expanding Knowledge

My second goal on returning to OJP was to build upon the momentum generated in recent years by the growth in the body of criminal and juvenile justice research and, specifically, to take the next important step of communicating distilled information to practitioners and policymakers who, after all, make the decisions that most directly affect community safety. The development and dissemination of knowledge about what works in addressing crime is a critical federal mission and one that our state, local, and tribal partners depend on us to perform. This function was outlined most clearly in 1967 by President Johnson’s Crime Commission, which called for a strong federal role in supporting research and gathering statistics.¹ Reflecting the bipartisan support for this goal, that principle was reinforced 14 years later by the Attorney General’s Task Force on Violent Crime under President Reagan, which said, without dissent, that “the federal government has a unique responsibility to conduct research on criminal justice issues” and “to test and evaluate . . . programs rigorously.”²

With few exceptions, local jurisdictions do not have the capital to make investments in criminal justice research. In his budget request to Congress this year – as he did last year – the President has proposed a three-percent set-aside of all OJP grant and reimbursement funds to be used for research, evaluation, and statistical purposes. Last

1 *The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society: A Report by the President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice*. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. February 1967.

2 *Attorney General’s Task Force on Violent Crime, Final Report*. U.S. Department of Justice, Washington, D.C. August 1981.

November, the Attorney General appointed an 18-member Science Advisory Board to guide the efforts of OJP in developing evidence-based policies and programs. The Board held its inaugural meeting in January and met again in June. And last year, the Senate confirmed the appointments of two respected scientists, John Laub and Jim Lynch, to lead the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). These actions reflect a strong effort on the part of the Administration and the Department to build the credibility and integrity of OJP's science functions.

Strengthening the science behind our work is an all-important first step. The next step, just as significant, is applying that knowledge. Without question, our knowledge about what works – in areas such as “hot spots” policing and swift and certain sanctions – and what doesn't – Scared Straight and the early Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) model come to mind – is expanding quickly. Regrettably, however, the growth in the body of evidence has outpaced our ability to make that evidence readily available to policymakers and practitioners.

Shortly after my return to OJP, I launched an agency-wide Evidence Integration Initiative designed to assess our understanding about what works in reducing and preventing crime and determine how to use that information to fight crime more effectively. The goal of this effort is to get this information out to the field in a comprehensible, practical format. We have already begun to explore strategies for sharing research about gangs and children exposed to violence so that law enforcement departments and other justice and human service system agencies can make decisions

based on the best information available. And in June, I was very pleased to announce the launch of CrimeSolutions.gov, a new Website with more than 150 programs covering a range of topics. These programs all come with a rating for effectiveness, and the hope is that the information it carries will be of use to our partners in the field.

I am also pleased that in 2012 OJP will open a State and Local Help Desk and Diagnostic Center. The Diagnostic Center is a one-stop shop for state and local leaders and agency heads seeking real-time diagnostic assistance and resources to solve public safety problems. The Diagnostic Center will operate a hotline, disseminate comprehensive training and technical assistance services focused on evidence-based practices, and support state and community executives in the implementation of evidence-based programs and practices in the field.

Sound Stewardship of Federal Funds

The only person to whom OJP owes a greater responsibility than its stakeholders is the American citizen and taxpayer. As I know you agree, we must all do our part to ensure that taxpayer funds are spent wisely, particularly in light of the difficult economic conditions that so many American families face today. As I said during my confirmation testimony, guarding against waste, fraud, and abuse is among my highest priorities. Under my direction, OJP has been working hard to cut costs and ensure proper oversight of grant and contractor funds and to administer those funds in the most transparent way possible.

Despite maintaining programmatic and fiscal responsibility for almost 14,000 active grants totaling almost \$10 billion with limited salary and expense funds, OJP has found ways to minimize costs. In Fiscal Year 2011, we cut staff travel expenses by 39% from the previous year and saved \$2 million through freezes on hiring, promotions, awards, and training. We also reassessed our Information Technology contracts, resulting in nearly \$5 million in additional savings. While I am concerned that additional cuts could significantly impact OJP's ability to serve its constituents and achieve its statutory mission, we are committed as an agency to spending taxpayer funds as efficiently as possible.

Under my direction, OJP has adopted a hard line approach to monitoring and oversight of its grantees, implementing agency-wide standard policies, procedures, and internal controls. We conduct desk reviews of each of our nearly 14,000 grants. Every quarter, all grants are assessed against risk factors to identify those in need of increased technical assistance and in-depth monitoring. OJP consistently exceeds its statutory requirement to conduct comprehensive monitoring of not less than 10% of total award dollars. In fact, in Fiscal Year 2011, we monitored more than twice the amount required by law.

The Department's Office of Inspector General (OIG), in a report earlier this year on the monitoring and oversight of OJP's Recovery Act and non-Recovery Act programs, highlighted many of these improvements and acknowledged the collaborative

relationship that OIG and OJP have developed. The Acting Inspector General said in her oversight testimony in February that the Department has taken positive steps to improve its grant management practices, in particular calling our efforts at OJP to implement the Recovery Act “extraordinary.”

OJP has embraced and aggressively implemented a host of recommendations from the OIG’s 2009 report, *Improving the Grant Management Process*. We have coordinated with grantees and the OIG to address issues identified in grant audits, and we have streamlined our follow-up audit activities, eliminating existing backlogs and allowing for more timely resolution of outstanding audit recommendations. In Fiscal Year 2011, OJP closed 122 of the 223 open single and OIG grant audit reports, which represents a return of \$5.3 million to the federal government for unallowable or unsupported costs.

I have instituted efforts to establish policies, procedures, and internal controls to ensure sound stewardship, strong programmatic and financial management, and effective monitoring and oversight of OJP’s grant programs. These controls not only address the overall soundness and integrity of the monitoring process but extend to the analysis of individual grant and contract line items, including conference costs.

I firmly believe that training conferences and on-site technical assistance are important and effective ways that OJP conveys information, skills, and knowledge about evidence-based practices to its state, local, and tribal law enforcement and criminal

justice constituents, and they are indispensable in fostering and strengthening collaboration and partnerships, which are critical in these difficult economic times. Moreover, OJP's authorizing statutes reflect Congress's intention for training conference costs to be used to help OJP achieve its mission. Yet it is imperative – and I am firmly committed to ensuring – that we make every effort to minimize planning and operational costs and ensure that funds spent on travel, lodging, and food and beverages are reasonable. Since my return to OJP, we have worked diligently to keep these costs to a minimum.

Prior to the recent OIG report on Department of Justice conferences, OJP had already taken concrete steps to limit spending in this area and ensure greater transparency and scrutiny of conference costs. For instance, before release of the report we had already revised our Financial Guide to require that all food and beverage costs funded under cooperative agreements comply with additional DOJ guidelines and added a special condition to all cooperative agreements outlining these requirements. In January, the Attorney General instructed all components to limit all travel, training, and conference spending to essential needs. As a result of these efforts, the Department's conference spending in the first two quarters of fiscal year 2011 was down by \$5.5 million from the same period the previous year.

We are also updating our policies to require that all award recipients involved in planning OJP conferences separately track and report all costs associated with conference planning, including salaries and benefits. We are requiring strict justification from event

planners for travel, lodging, and food and beverage costs. We are improving our process for identifying cost-effective training and technical assistance services and building that into our selection process for cooperative agreements. And we have significantly limited staff participation in conferences and other events, relying as much as possible on videoconferencing and other means of communication.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, I remain committed to strengthening partnerships with our stakeholders and sister federal agencies and developing and disseminating knowledge about what works to the field. I also believe strongly that our success in fulfilling our mission to improve the fair administration of justice – a goal premised on winning the public’s trust – depends on our ability to account for the funding we are responsible for administering. I look forward to working with the Subcommittee to ensure that our programs and activities meet the high standards that you expect of us and that the American people deserve.

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