

REMARKS

OF

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

AT THE

**OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS
SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD
INAUGURAL MEETING**

ON

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 28, 2011
WASHINGTON, DC**

Good morning, and welcome to the inaugural meeting of the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) Science Advisory Board. I'm delighted, as I look around this room, to see the assemblage of immense talent here.

I'm so pleased, in particular, at Al Blumstein's agreeing to serve as Chair. Al's been a hero of mine for so many decades – and I know he's revered by many of us around this table. In fact, he served on the President's Crime Commission back in 1967, which recommended the creation of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), the predecessor agency to OJP.

But Al is joined here by so many distinguished leaders from social science and academia – and from practice. I can't single out all of you, but I am so thankful – really, awed – by the fact that all of you agreed to serve on this Board.

I also want to express my thanks to my Principal Deputy, Mary Lou Leary; Marlene Beckman, the Designated Federal Officer (DFO) for the Federal Advisory Committee; John Laub, Director of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ); Jim Lynch, Director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS); Jeff Slowikowski, Acting Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP); Jim Burch, Acting Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA); and Joye Frost, Acting Director of the Office for Victims of Crime.

I had the opportunity to serve seven years at OJP – as many of you know – under former Attorney General Janet Reno. Attorney General Eric Holder convinced me to return to government and the Obama Administration after nine years in academia. It's now been two years – today – since I came back to OJP. One reason I did come back was because of my concern about how “science” was being treated.

I returned with a list of 10 goals for OJP from my work in the Obama transition. Two relate to science. First, I pledged to instill a focus on data-driven, evidence-based approaches to reducing crime.

Second, I wanted to restore the integrity of, and respect for, science. I was concerned that this was – perhaps – not, shall we say, at the top of the list in the prior eight years.

And as I began work in late January of 2009, I had four specific priorities relating to the science work:

- First, to strengthen NIJ and BJS and to ensure their independence.
- Second, to ensure we had strong scientists to head these two agencies.
- Third, to try to increase the funding for both.
- And fourth, to increase attention to science across OJP, including on the program side.

One of the first things I did when I returned was to sit down with Kris Rose, NIJ's Acting Director at the time, to talk – for example – about changing internal procedures for NIJ's handling of peer review. I felt that we should return control of this process back to NIJ. I also talked with BJS about how to ensure its independence in handling its publications process. I began discussions with OJP's General Counsel on how we could write these protections into law through the Department's reauthorization process.

But it's certainly not enough to discuss issues like these in the isolation of OJP. We are blessed with an Attorney General in Eric Holder who cares about science. He actually talks about it a great deal and meets fairly regularly with researchers. One reflection of his interest is that he will be coming here to meet with you at 11:00 a.m.!

The Attorney General is committed to a budget that reflects support for science. OJP's science programs receive that support in the President's budget request for FY 2011. There's a three-percent set-aside for social science in the request. This is one of my top priorities, and the President, the Attorney General, the Office of Management and Budget, and the House and Senate have all backed it. We'll have to see how this turns out, but it would produce \$55 million in social science investments.

And this is an Administration – the Obama Administration – that is committed to science. President Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum on Scientific Integrity on March 9, 2009 that declared the importance of science in guiding Administration decisions. This was reinforced by a December 17, 2010 memorandum released by the Director of the White House Office of Science & Technology Policy, John Holdren, underscoring the prohibition on political interference in scientific processes and the crucial nature of transparency.

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Let me also briefly address my affirmative agenda for science at OJP since my return.

Shortly after I came back to OJP, I launched – probably my top priority since arriving at OJP – an Evidence Integration Initiative. Dr. Phelan Wyrick of my staff heads this effort, and he will talk more about it later during the meeting. In short, it has three purposes:

- First, to improve the quantity and quality of evidence that we generate at OJP through our research, evaluation, and statistical functions;
- Second, to better integrate that evidence into program and policy decisions; and,
- Third, to improve the translation of evidence into practice.

Which brings me to this Science Advisory Board – why Attorney General Eric Holder and I felt it was so critical to establish this and what purpose we see for it. In other words, why are you here?

It's important at the beginning to stress that it this is an OJP Science Board. It's not just for the science agencies – NIJ and BJS – but for all of OJP. Don't we want science to be infusing the *programmatic* side, as well?

The great bulk of OJP's nearly three billion dollar budget is on the programmatic side, in our Bureau of Justice Assistance and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, for example. So it's crucial to rely on what we know “works” in designing programs that we're funding.

What are the roles the Board can and should play? I'd like to suggest six:

- First, to look at the broad role of science within OJP and how we can better integrate what we learn from science into our programmatic design and spending.
- Second, to think about ways, of course, to strengthen the research and statistical functions within OJP.
- Third, to suggest broad priorities on which research might be focused.
- Fourth – and I think this is a critical area, particularly in light of certain events at OJP in the last decade – to consider and make recommendations about institutional ways to protect the science here going into the future. We may not enjoy the support for science in future Assistant Attorneys General and Attorneys General that we have today. DOJ's is a lawyer culture and we know from history that it can be hostile to science. We need to build in protections.
- Fifth, to think about ways that OJP can more effectively connect researchers with practitioners and policymakers – particularly on translation of evidence – and generally serve as an avenue for outreach to the field and a promoter of a two-way dialogue.
- And finally, to play a helpful role in providing advice and counsel to us on practical concerns, like improving the way we handle peer review.

I know I could add – as you can – many things to this agenda, but that's the broad mandate I see.

So I appreciate all of you taking time to be here to advise us. I cannot thank you enough. I look forward to the day's conversation, and to the work ahead.

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