



**REMARKS OF ROBERT L. LISTENBEE
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OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION
AT THE
NATIONAL CHILD TRAUMATIC STRESS NETWORK
13TH ANNUAL ALL-NETWORK CONFERENCE
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*REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY***

Hello, everyone. I'm Bob Listenbee, Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention at the Department of Justice.

I would like to thank Robert Pynoos, John Fairbank, and Paolo del Vecchio for those welcoming remarks.

And I also wish to thank Captain Robinson and the entire staff at the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress for having me here today.

It's wonderful to be here at this 13th annual all-network conference.

I want to talk to you briefly about our Office's commitment to juvenile justice system reform—a commitment that embraces policies and practices that are trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and evidence-based.

The primary focus of my talk today will be the Attorney General's Defending Childhood Initiative, which the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention administers.

I should mention that several Network members served on the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children's Exposure to Violence, which I co-chaired. So I have gotten to know some of you on a close professional basis.

I am also getting to know additional Network members who currently serve on the Attorney General's Advisory Committee on American Indian and Alaska Native Children Exposed to Violence.

I want to acknowledge and express my gratitude for the expertise on trauma that these individuals have brought and are bringing to our work. I'd like to mention just a few names: Alicia Lieberman, Steven Marans, Robert Macy, Julian Ford, Dee Bigfoot, and Marilyn Zimmerman to name a few. Thank you, all.

Your insights and perspectives are absolutely critical.

However, all of you here today—child trauma researchers, clinicians and administrators, family members, youth advocates, and trauma survivors—are an invaluable resource to those of us in the juvenile justice field.

There is a deep well of information and personal experience in this room—so I look forward to a conversation with you following my presentation.

I am going to speak briefly and then open up the floor to a discussion.

I'm particularly interested in your thoughts on how the National Child Traumatic Stress Network can continue to support our Office in its efforts to more effectively address children's exposure to violence and trauma—and how our Office can support you in your important work.

First, I'd like to start with the vision statement that guides all our work at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

At the Office, we envision a nation where our children are healthy, educated, and free from violence.

If they come into contact with the juvenile justice system, the contact should be rare, fair, and beneficial to them.

Congress has charged the Office with two primary responsibilities:

- 1) First, we must protect children in our nation who are victims of violence, crime, and abuse.

2) Second, we must address the needs of youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system and of those who are at risk of becoming involved with the system.

These two mandates are closely connected.

Research has shown us that children who experience violence and trauma are more likely to:

- abuse drugs and alcohol;
- suffer from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic disorders;
- fail in school and in the workplace;
- suffer from serious medical problems;
- engage in delinquent and criminal behavior.

A study supported by our Office— called the Northwestern Juvenile Project— is the first-ever large-scale, longitudinal study of drug, alcohol, and psychiatric disorders in a diverse sample of juvenile detainees.

Among many other findings, the research revealed that 84 percent of youth in detention have experienced more than one trauma. And more than 56 percent have been exposed to trauma six or more times.

But in most juvenile justice systems, screening for post-traumatic stress disorder is absent from the standard mental health screening process.

That has got to change.

And the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is committed to making that change happen.

The good news is that the experts in this room have developed the tools to accurately identify, screen, and assess exposure to violence and trauma.

Because of the important work that has already been done, we also know what works to address trauma.

Now we must work together energetically to disseminate evidence-based policies and practices nationwide and support the implementation of these solutions where they are needed.

OJJDP's support for trauma-informed practices is part of a broader call for the juvenile justice system to be more responsive to the developmental needs of children.

The National Academy of Sciences report, *Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach*, which our Office commissioned, emphasizes that, whether it's in the courts or in facilities that confine youth, we must remember that kids are different than adults.

Research has shown that neurobiological processes in the developing brain play a large role in the impulsiveness, susceptibility to peer pressure, and difficulty in assessing long-term consequences that characterize adolescence.

Because of what the science has shown us about brain development, adolescent offenders are by definition less culpable than adult offenders, and they are more capable of changing their behavior because they're still growing, they're still developing.

The National Academy's report emphasizes that the harsh, punitive practices that characterize most juvenile facilities do not meet the developmental needs of the youth in their care.

According to this report, the three most important components of healthy psychological development for adolescents are: 1) the involvement of a supportive adult authority figure; 2) association with prosocial peers; and 3) activities that encourage autonomous decisionmaking.

These three essential elements are often missing in facilities that confine youth.

These kids are often sent to facilities far away from their families, friends, and communities, a particularly serious problem in Indian country and rural areas.

Their education is interrupted.

In adult facilities, young people run a significantly higher risk of suicide, physical assault, and rape. Kids in adult facilities are often put in solitary confinement, where they can languish for years with virtually no contact with other people, receiving their meals through a slot in the door.

Many of these kids are at risk of being retraumatized by the system—and come out worse off than when they walked in.

In 2009, our Office released the results of the first National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence, the most comprehensive nationwide survey of the incidence and prevalence of children's exposure to violence ever conducted.

The study was funded by our Office with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Howard Spivak, head of the CDC's Division of Violence Prevention, was an important partner in this work.

Let me share with you four key findings:

- 60 percent of children in the United States were exposed to violence, crime, or abuse in their homes, schools and communities, either as victims or witnesses—during the 1-year initial survey period.
- Almost 40 percent of children were direct victims of 2 or more violent acts during that same period.
- 1 in 10 were victims of violence 5 or more times in the past year.
- And nearly 1 in 10 saw a family member assault another family member.

The Attorney General has been personally and professionally committed to the issue of children exposed to violence for many years, and in 2010, he launched the Defending Childhood Initiative to:

- Prevent children's exposure.
- Mitigate the negative effects experienced by children's exposed to violence.

- Develop knowledge and spread awareness about this issue.

As part of the Defending Childhood Initiative, Attorney General Holder established a National Task Force on Children's Exposed to Violence to gather information about children's exposure to violence; hold hearings with experts, survivors, and community advocates; and develop a plan to address this issue on a national scale.

From late 2011 through early 2012, our task force held public hearings and listening sessions with practitioners, policymakers, academics, and community members about the problem of children's exposure to violence.

As we traveled across the country, the task force heard from dozens of people who work to prevent, reduce, and treat children's exposure to violence, as well as from many who have experienced it.

Their stories of what they had seen and lived through were sometimes horrifying but always inspired us to deeper commitment. What we learned from them has changed the way we think about this issue.

I came away from the task force hearings convinced that the long-term negative outcomes of exposure to violence can be prevented, and children exposed to violence are resilient and can recover.

The task force briefed Congress on the public hearings and used the input from the hearings to write a report to the Attorney General laying out a blueprint for a coordinated, national campaign to address this issue.

The task force report was released to the Attorney General in December 2012, and he approved an action plan based on the report in April 2013.

We have gotten very positive feedback on the report from across the justice arena and beyond.

The report was unanimously endorsed by the American Bar Association.

In addition, the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators have commended the report and encouraged state court leaders

to consider the recommendations of the task force as they undertake juvenile justice system reforms.

The report offers recommendations across a broad spectrum, including the need for universal training for professionals in all child-serving systems on the identification, screening, assessment, and treatment of trauma caused by children's exposure to violence; comprehensive strategies for preventing and intervening in violence against children in their homes and communities; and a special section on the ways in which we need to rethink our juvenile justice system so that it more effectively responds to the problem.

I'm now going to talk about just a few of those recommendations, and how the Defending Childhood Initiative and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention are moving forward.

Recommendation: Create Strong Community Partnerships Across Child-Serving Systems; Engage Youth as Leaders and Peer Experts

No provider, agency, or program can be fully successful without the coordination of many disciplines, professional, organizations, business, and concerned adults and children in coalitions that take a positive stand against violence.

Therefore, our task force recommended that communities organize local coalitions including law enforcement, the courts, health care, schools, family services, child protection, domestic violence programs, rape crisis centers, and child advocacy centers, families, and other community members.

We made this recommendation to encourage more local communities to adopt the approach being taken in the eight Defending Childhood demonstration sites originally funded by OJJDP, the Office on Violence Against Women, and the Office for Victims of Crime in 2010.

[Report of the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, Recommendation 5.1, pp. 145–46].

How We're Taking Action:

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has continued to support these eight communities and we are working with them to develop and

test community-wide, cross-sector models to prevent children's exposure to violence.

We also are evaluating these efforts to ensure that what we learn will be of use to other communities as they embark on similar efforts.

The eight sites are:

- Boston, MA
- Cuyahoga County, OH
- City of Grand Forks, ND
- Multnomah County, OR
- City of Portland, ME
- Rocky Boy Reservation, MT
- Rosebud Sioux Tribe, SD
- Shelby County, TN

OJJDP is also supporting tailored training and technical assistance and facilitating information sharing among the sites, which we view as learning laboratories or communities of practice.

The training and technical assistance is being provided by Futures Without Violence, an organization with three decades of experience in education programs, national policy development, professional training programs, and advocacy designed to end violence against women, children, and families.

These sites are working to provide universal screening and assessment as well as evidence-based treatment and interventions to combat children's exposure to violence across systems.

Prevention, intervention, treatment, and community organizing strategies are being integrated to provide a comprehensive continuum of care to children and teens.

Let me share just three examples of the exciting work:

In Boston, three neighborhoods with the highest rates of violence, poverty, and other disparities have developed:

- Nurturing Parent Programs in five community-based organizations.
- A training institute and learning collaboratives to build knowledge and trauma-sensitive services across multiple sectors.
- Support for mental health clinician positions in two community-based health centers that serve children affected by domestic violence.
- Youth-led special marketing and community mobilization activities.

These Boston neighborhoods are also working toward policy changes that will promote trauma-informed approaches across the child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health systems.

The Rosebud Sioux Tribe in South Dakota is targeting its activities reservation-wide and its progress includes:

- Establishing tribal legislation and policy that is more responsive to children exposed to violence.
- Increasing referrals to services.
- Enhancing victim services.
- Developing reporting protocols
- Increasing coordination and data collection.
- Launching a public awareness campaign.

- Providing trainings and community forums.

The Multnomah County, OR, Defending Childhood demonstration site is:

- Implementing county-wide awareness and training activities in the area of domestic violence.
- Creating seven youth leadership councils.
- Placing a domestic violence specialist within Head Start programs.
- Developing policy reforms that are being initiated within child welfare agencies, schools, agencies that serve homeless youth, and the courts.
- Implementing screening and identification tools for children's exposure to violence on a county-wide basis.

I am enthusiastic about this work at the Defending Childhood sites, because what we learn from the demonstration sites will provide the foundation for creating models of reform that we can then disseminate across our nation.

Recommendation: Reform Policies at the State and Local Levels

The ultimate success of our effort to prevent and address children's exposure to violence depends on adoption and implementation in communities nationwide.

The task force recommended that state, tribal, and local governments develop and implement public policy initiatives to reduce and address the impact of childhood exposure to violence.

[Report of the Attorney General's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence, Recommendation 1.9, p. 43].

How We're Taking Action:

The Defending Childhood State Policy Initiative

In fiscal year 2014, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention will work with the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, the

Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Education, and Futures Without Violence to develop a state policy initiative.

The initiative will be modeled on the state policy academy approach developed by the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to tap top state officials, such as the Attorney General or Governor, to work across child-serving systems to identify, blend, and "braid" funding streams that can be used to treat trauma and implement standards of care at the local level for children exposed to violence.

The initiative will also be helping states to leverage resources by collaborating closely with child welfare and mental health agencies to facilitate identification, screening, assessment, and treatment of children exposed to violence.

We will be working with three to four states to serve as models for these commissions.

State teams selected to participate in the policy initiative will work hand in hand with a new subcommittee of the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, which brings together representatives from agencies across the federal government—Health and Human Services, Justice, Education, Labor, and many others—to address the needs of children in a coordinated way.

The new subcommittee is scheduled to convene for the first time this spring.

The state teams and the subcommittee will work together to identify means of supporting the identification, screening, and treatment of trauma.

Recommendation: Raise Public Awareness About Children's Exposure to Violence and Evidence-Based Interventions

The general public has a limited understanding of the extent of children's exposure to violence and its adverse impact on health, social and emotional development, and academic and economic achievement. The public has even less awareness that healing for children is possible in the aftermath of violence if they are identified in a timely manner.

Therefore, the task force recommended that sustained public information and advocacy initiatives be implemented to create a better-informed citizenry and to change social norms. A well-informed public can advocate effectively for higher levels of services and support from policymakers for both prevention and early intervention for children exposed to violence.

[—*Report of the Attorney General’s National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence*, Recommendation 2.1, p. 69).]

How We’re Taking Action:

The Defending Childhood Initiative will launch a comprehensive campaign to educate our nation about the seriousness of children’s exposure to violence and what can be done to reverse its negative impacts.

Representatives from all of the bureaus and offices within the Office of Justice Programs as well as the Office on Violence Against Women and the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services are working with Futures Without Violence to develop and design this campaign.

In addition to this public awareness campaign, we are also disseminating critical information through our Office's online Model Programs Guide, a widely recognized resource for valuable information on the effectiveness of many juvenile programs.

The updated guide contains 80 effective and promising programs for meeting the needs of children exposed to violence and victimization, including trauma-informed services.

Our Office has also developed a series of downloadable Trauma-Informed Care Tip Sheets for professionals and parents who come into contact with children and families who have been exposed to violence or who are at risk of such exposure.

Recommendation: Help Tribal Communities To Heal

American Indian and Alaska Native children have an exceptional degree of unmet need for services and support to prevent and respond to the extreme levels of violence they experience. Native youth have a 2.5 times greater risk for experiencing trauma when compared with their non-Native peers.

The federal government has a unique legal responsibility based, at least in part, on its trust responsibility.

Therefore, the task force recommended the establishment of a federal task force, appointed by the Attorney General and the Secretary of the Interior, to examine the needs of American Indian and Alaska Native children exposed to violence and recommend actions to protect tribal children from abuse and neglect and reduce violence.

[—*Report of the Attorney General’s National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence*, Recommendation 1.2, p. 38)]

How We’re Taking Action:

In November 2013, Attorney General Eric Holder announced the creation of a new Task Force on American Indian and Alaska Native Children Exposed to Violence.

Priorities for this task force include:

- Developing appropriate strategies to improve the identification, screening, assessment, and treatment of tribal youth traumatized by violence.
- Supporting tribal communities as they develop their own solutions to the problem.
- Involving tribal youth in the creation of those solutions.
- Implementing screening and identification tools for children’s exposure to violence on a county-wide basis.

In a matter of a few months, our Office has moved quickly along with many others at the Justice Department and the Department of the Interior to organize the task force, appoint its members, and launch this important work.

The task force is anchored by:

- A federal working group that includes U.S. Attorneys and officials from the U.S. Departments of the Interior and Justice.
- An advisory committee of experts on American Indian/Alaska Native studies, child health and trauma, and child welfare.

The advisory committee is chaired by former U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan and Iroquois composer and musical artist Joanne Shenandoah.

The committee is examining exposure to violence in the home and in the community; the needs of children in urban and rural areas outside reservations or tribal villages; the traumatic experiences of those who have been incarcerated in state, federal, and tribal judicial systems; and issues specific to Alaska Native youth.

The advisory committee has already held two public hearings, one in Bismarck, North Dakota in December; and one in Scottsdale, Arizona earlier this month. Two more hearings are scheduled this spring in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and Anchorage, Alaska.

Based on the testimony at the hearings, on indepth research, and on extensive input from experts, advocates, and impacted families and communities nationwide, the advisory committee will issue a final report to the Attorney General presenting its findings and comprehensive policy recommendations in the fall of 2014.

All of these recent developments I just described in our Defending Childhood Initiative are bringing us closer to our goals of—

- placing children's exposure to violence front and center in the national conversation;
- changing the policies and practice of our systems so they are evidence-based, trauma-informed, and more responsive to the developmental needs of children; and in the process;
- making a concrete and positive difference in the lives of children, families, and the communities they live in.

I look forward to the road ahead.

I'd like to conclude my remarks by briefly sharing my broader vision for juvenile justice reform.

Let me first say that I believe we live in auspicious times.

All the stars seem to be in the right place.

Over the past two decades, advances in research have provided us with a comprehensive toolkit of evidence-based programs and practices for responding when children are exposed to violence. We also know so much more about how to promote youth justice and safety.

For example, we know much more than we did just five years ago about the impact of violence and trauma not just on a child generally—but the impact at each stage of a child's development.

We also have the tools to counter those effects at each stage, and assist children to heal and thrive.

At the same time, there is a rising tide of reform in our juvenile justice system. Local jurisdictions are responding to what the science is telling us about the often-negative consequences of detention and incarceration to a young person's health and well-being, as well as to their chances of rehabilitation and desistance from crime.

Jurisdictions are beginning to move away from a reliance on detention and incarceration and instead focus on community-based programs and services that more effectively address the multiple needs of young people who are at risk or who are involved in the system.

Jurisdictions are realizing that community-based services are more effective at promoting positive outcomes for young people than correctional institutions—and these community-based services are a fraction of the cost.

Expensive and ineffective juvenile facilities are being closed down, and alternatives to detention are being put into action.

Fiscal resources are being reinvested in substance abuse, mental health services, vocational training, and other effective forms of support within communities.

At the same time, we're working hard to close off "feeders" to the juvenile justice system.

As we try to stem the unnecessary and inappropriate flow of kids into the system, one of the first places we have to look is at school discipline.

Of the 3.3 million children suspended from school each year, 95 percent are sanctioned for nonviolent offenses like disruptive behavior and violating dress codes. Youth who are suspended or expelled were nearly three times as likely to be in contact with the juvenile justice system the following year.

The American Psychological Association's Zero Tolerance Task Force found that children with emotional disturbances are disciplined at a disproportionately high rate.

One can only imagine what a difference it would make if we had teachers, school coaches, administrators, and counselors trained to identify exposure to trauma and trained to refer these children to the appropriate mental health services in their community for help.

We also know that African American youth are disproportionately disciplined as compared with their white peers.

Through the Supportive School Discipline, which the Attorney General launched in 2011 along with Education Secretary Arne Duncan, we are trying to end the school-to-prison pipeline, which boots children out of school and into court at alarming rates for relatively minor infractions. Our Office is a key member of that initiative.

In January, the Justice and Education Departments jointly released a resource package for policymakers, legislators, educators, law enforcement professionals, healthcare practitioners, advocates, and researchers to assist them in creating safe and positive school climates.

The package includes guidance on how schools can meet their legal obligations under federal law to administer student discipline without discriminating against students on the basis of race, color, or national origin.

Our Office is also providing financial assistance to the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to evaluate the replication of successful school and court partnerships. This project is designed to reduce student referrals to court for nonserious behaviors by developing a curriculum and training that will be tested in up to 16 sites.

In addition to these efforts to keep kids who don't need to belong there out of the juvenile justice system, we are also seeing momentum building for policies and practices that more effectively meet the needs of youth and families who have already come into contact with the system.

And our Office is embracing this effort in a wide range of areas.

For example, our Office is working with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to promote "trauma-responsive justice" in our courts. As part of this process, the Council is developing tools to evaluate court practices, policies, and environment through a trauma-responsive lens.

In addition, the Office is also working to promote the importance of family engagement in our juvenile justice system.

Too often, families are kept at the margins in our system, whether in the courts, in the development of a case plan, or in the basic ability to maintain regular contact with their loved ones.

Through the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, our Office brought together agencies from across the federal government to discuss and highlight the issue, held a training session for our staff, held listening sessions with youth and families with firsthand experience in the system, and we recently issued a report on the findings of those listening sessions.

So two of our primary goals are to prevent entry into the system where it is not absolutely necessary and to reduce trauma for children and families who are already involved with the system.

But we can never forget the young people who are transitioning out of the system and trying to start up their lives again.

Young people reentering the community from juvenile residential facilities often lack the support they need to change the course of their lives and avoid the destructive cycle of recidivism. Many struggle to stay in school; others lack the necessary skills to obtain meaningful employment; some may come from troubled or broken families; and many others have substance abuse and mental health problems.

Through activities and special programs funded by the Second Chance Act, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Department of Justice are working to address the multiple needs of these young people by offering services, supervision, and support to help ensure a successful transition.

So these are just a very few examples of the work we are doing to address children's exposure to violence, and to ensure the most positive outcomes possible for the young people who come across our path.

We know that the primarily "corrective" mindset of the juvenile justice system has not been effective.

We now know a "public health" mindset must be incorporated to a greater degree in our system if we are to succeed in helping children desist from violence and crime.

Issues of child and adolescent health and exposure to violence and trauma must be considered as we try to improve our juvenile justice system

That is why we are working in close partnership with experts across the Department of Health and Human Services on the Defending Childhood Initiative and other violence prevention efforts in our Office.

We are currently working with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, which has developed a conceptual framework for trauma, a set of operating principles, and guidance for a trauma-informed approach that can be applied across multiple service sectors.

About two weeks ago, I joined experts in health, violence prevention, social services administration, and program development at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta for a Grand Rounds public health discussion on youth violence prevention. 10,000 people attended this session via

Webcast—which gives you good idea of the intense national interest in this topic.

However, this is only the beginning.

I also want to reach out to all the experts in this room as we in juvenile justice apply a developmental, "public health" lens to every facet of our work.

I look forward to your ideas, your perspectives, and your support.

Thank you.