



**REMARKS OF ROBERT L. LISTENBEE
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*REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY***

We have come to the part of our program where we look back briefly over the past couple of days, set our sights on what lies ahead, and say our good-byes until the next time we gather.

I think I speak for everyone here when I say that we have all learned a great deal through the successes, challenges, and insights that each of you has shared during this summit.

The past 2 days have provided us a great many takeaways.

The panels, discussions, and presentations have offered a clear picture of how far we have come. They also have pointed us toward what we must do to build on our momentum.

The challenge before each of us—whether you are from a Forum, Defending Childhood, STRYVE, or Community-Based Violence Prevention community or one of the federal agencies—is to familiarize ourselves with the concepts of well-being and violence prevention.

We need to be singing from the same sheet of music. This means we have to continue to enhance our internal coordination and collaboration. This is as true of the federal agencies as it is each of the communities represented here.

OJJDP is working with the other Forum federal agencies to develop a policy framework that will embrace all of our violence prevention work. Our efforts are focused on developing a common conceptual framework and a common language to guide our work in the future.

The effectiveness of our response to violence and its impact on children’s cognitive, emotional, physical, behavioral, and social development depends upon us having a common understanding of the problem. This will lead to the development of multidisciplinary policies, practices, and programs to address violence prevention and children’s exposure to violence.

The federal partners are constructing a framework that will embrace the work we are doing through the Forum, Defending Childhood, STRYVE, and Community-based Violence Prevention initiatives.

If there is strength in numbers, then our goal is to weave together the combined strengths and expertise of each of these programs into our violence prevention work. The names of the programs may be different, but we share the same goals: reducing violence in our communities and putting children on the path to healthy development.

At OJJDP, we are busy realigning our priorities. We have a vision that guides our work. 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.

As the OJJDP Administrator, I believe our mission is very clear. It is about the well-being of our young people and understanding how critical their well-being is not only to their own development, success, and future, but also to the future of our country. Childhood should not be marred by violence, crime, or abuse.

Reducing youth violence in our communities is a top Administration and DOJ priority. So many of our nation's youth struggle under developmental burdens as a result of their experiences with violence. As a result, this nation pays a very high price, as well.

It is important that we understand how and why young people become violent. At DOJ and OJJDP, we are following what the science tells us about adolescent development and the circumstances behind youth violence.

The science is clearly laid out in the report *Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach*, which the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences recently released. This OJJDP-funded report examines what research is telling us about adolescent brain and behavioral development. The report offers recommendations that can transform how policymakers, practitioners, and researchers address the needs of children who are violent or who are the victims of violence.

Our response to youth violence must be based on the understanding that adolescents are still a work in progress.

We have learned a great deal about why kids run afoul of the law, how violence and abuse affect kids, and what we can do to keep kids safe.

Research has shown us that in many cases kids who are victims are at greater risk of becoming offenders. Kids who are exposed to violence, abuse, and neglect begin as victims. The sad truth is that kids who are victims often go on to victimize others as they get older. As often happens, these kids become involved in the justice system.

It stands to reason that if you reduce a child's exposure to violence, you reduce the likelihood that the child will become violent.

We have learned that this problem cannot be solved by one department or agency alone. The challenges are too complex and require more resources and expertise than any one agency possesses.

This is why the Forum makes such sense. Together, we are developing a common understanding, a common language if you would, about juvenile violence and victimization and what we can do about it.

Make no mistake: we have the answers to violence and what we must do to address it.

It requires greater cooperation and collaboration on everyone's part. It requires that we understand that our goal is to help our young people correct the corrosive, toxic effects of violence on their lives. It requires that we create an environment in our communities that supports the well-being and healthy development of our children.

None of us can do this alone. OJJDP can't do it, nor can OJP or DOJ do it alone. The federal government can't do it alone. The engine driving this endeavor resides in your states and communities. We need to leverage every resource available to us.

The federal partners will bring our expertise and resources to the table.

As you probably know, OJJDP recently made several awards to advance our work in violence prevention. They include:

- More than \$1.4 million in funding for the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention.
- Nearly \$8 million in funding for our Defending Childhood work (this includes continuation funding for the 8 Defending Childhood sites).
- Funding to work with states to develop policies to reduce the impact of children's exposure to violence and to adopt the recommendations of the Attorney General's Task Force.
- And funding to provide training and technical assistance to the demonstration sites, mount a public education campaign, and help institute recommendations from the Attorney General's Task Force.
- More than \$8 million to six new Community-Based Violence Prevention sites across the country.

We will also support two initiatives to help communities reduce the number of youth entering the juvenile justice system and the unfair treatment of minority youth.

The Equal Justice Initiative will work with OJJDP to find effective ways to confront youth violence, overrepresentation of minority youth in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, and racial profiling.

And Civics First, Inc. will implement a national training project to improve police officers' skills in communicating with youth and increase police awareness of disproportionate minority contact with the juvenile justice system.

But federal funding will never be enough. We need to look beyond our community boundaries for other sources of support. Does your state have untapped resources that you can bring to bear? Foundations also offer a wealth of resources, whether it is technical assistance or funding for efforts like yours. I urge you to be creative, to leave no stone unturned.

I want to pause a moment to talk about the Do the Write Thing Challenge.

This program of the National Campaign to Stop Violence gives middle school students a voice in violence prevention activities in their communities. The key component of this challenge is an essay contest in which the students commit themselves to not engage in violence and discuss the causes and solutions for violence.

In July, I participated in a national recognition ceremony for some of the best essays to emerge from this year's challenge. I was so moved by Tiana Henry's essay that I wanted her to share it with you. Tiana is a talented seventh grader at the Detroit Enterprise Academy. Tiana, could you please come forward?

[Tiana reads her essay]

Thank you, Tiana, for sharing your thoughts with us today, and thank you, Mrs. Henry, for accompanying Tiana. We appreciate you being here today.

As Tiana made clear, our young people can be a critical component of our efforts to address community violence.

Growing up is a tricky process even under the best of circumstances. And it is easily derailed through violence and trauma. Trauma can stunt normal development and socialization in a growing child.

Look for a moment at the young people in our mental health, child welfare, substance abuse, and juvenile justice systems. Fundamentally, they are all the same kids.

We must look at the violence and trauma that have contributed to a young person coming into contact with the system.

We can all agree that the juvenile justice system should not focus on locking up kids and throwing away the key. Instead, it should be dedicated to finding the keys to their success.

This is the framework the federal partners are developing in our response to youth violence.

President Obama recently said: "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

We are the agents of change.

I believe we are at a crossroads. We can continue to see troubled young people as the problem. Or, we can embrace the vision that youth violence is preventable.

Trauma-informed care and age- and developmentally informed responses will help us improve our collective impact on violence and victimization.

Each of you is involved in such important work that is transforming your communities. The federal partners here in Washington appreciate your hard work and dedication.

Together, we are offering our children, our families, and our neighborhoods hope where little or none existed before. And we are building a better future for our nation.

I look forward to the next summit and the opportunity to hear of everything you are doing in your communities.

Together, we can make a real difference in our children's lives.

Thank you.