



**REMARKS OF ROBERT L. LISTENBEE
ADMINISTRATOR
OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION
AT THE
CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS LISTENING SESSION
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*REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY***

Hello, everyone.

I'd like to thank the White House Domestic Policy Council and Office of Public Engagement for joining with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to host this listening session.

And, I want to express my gratitude to all of you for traveling here to discuss the millions of children in our nation who—through no fault of their own—live each day separated from a parent who is in prison.

Some of you with us today know firsthand what this feels like—to be parents who are incarcerated and feel far away from your children — and to be children who don't get to see their parents nearly as often as you'd like because your parents have been taken away.

Many of you have also spent years advocating for families in this challenging situation— others of you have created innovative programs to provide vulnerable children with an adult mentor as they face unexpected changes going on in their lives. Unfortunately, many of the children you work with encounter stigma at school or on the playground. Many of them have to adjust to abrupt shifts in family structure, or to sudden financial insecurity.

It should go without saying that parents in this situation suffer as much as their children. A weekly phone call is hardly adequate for the complicated and intensive requirements of parenting. And, because the majority of the parents are placed in facilities more than 100 miles away, visits are difficult, if not impossible.

When visits are possible, there are often intimidating security procedures, lengthy waiting periods, and an atmosphere that is not conducive to bonding between children and their parents.

Between 1995 and 2005, the number of incarcerated women in our nation increased by 57 percent, compared to 34 percent for men. Three of every four of these women is a mother.

The vast majority of these mothers tell us that separation from their children is the single most difficult thing about confinement.

For many of these women, incarceration means their children have to live with someone other than a biological parent. This could be a grandparent. It could be an aunt or an uncle.

But, way too often, these mothers stand by helplessly as their child is placed in foster care, into the hands of complete strangers.

It is difficult for us to even contemplate having to watch this happen to our own children.

At the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, we understand only too well the impact this trauma can have on children.

Current research helps us understand that having a parent incarcerated for even part of a person's childhood can have long-term effects on a person's mental health, employment, and the likelihood of misusing alcohol and other drugs. It also raises the risk of their entering the justice system, either as children and adolescents—or later in life.

I don't have to tell the group gathered here today, that a mentor—one caring adult who is consistently present in a child's life—can make a big difference.

We can all benefit from good mentors who give us and our children a sense of closeness and emotional connection, active guidance, and a positive role model. I had good mentors in my own life, and I credit them in large measure for who I am today.

Recognizing the substantial benefits, our Office has long supported mentoring to promote positive outcomes for at-risk young people.

In fiscal year 2013, which is ending today, OJJDP provided more than \$75 million to support state and national organizations that engage youth in mentoring and in positive activities that help connect youth with caring adults.

As part of this funding commitment, we continue to support research and demonstration programs to help further our understanding of these adult—youth relationships. And this year, our Office is proud to announce the launch of our National Mentoring Resource Center.

The center will provide comprehensive resource, reference, and training materials and advance the implementation of evidence- and research-based mentoring practices. Our goal is to enhance the capacity of mentoring organizations to develop, implement, and expand effective mentoring practices.

We're constantly trying to learn more about what works and what does not work in mentoring.

Research indicates that, among the characteristics of mentoring programs that increase the likelihood for positive outcomes are the 1) length, 2) frequency, and 3) quality of the mentoring relationship.

We're also finding that there is no one-size-fits-all answer. In our mentoring programs for tribal youth, for children with disabilities, and for victims of child sex exploitation, each of these special circumstances brings along with it particular adjustments, particular kinds of guidance, particular needs.

One of my goals for this listening session is that we identify more clearly the mentoring needs of children of incarcerated parents—and that we identify mentoring practices and positive youth development strategies that will make a difference.

We're hoping that the information from this session will help our Office develop a better understanding of the needs of youth and their families and how the Administration and our Office specifically can be more responsive to those needs.

The number of children with an incarcerated parent has increased by almost 80 percent since 1991. There is no time to lose. That's why I am looking forward to listening to all of you today, and to the report that will be coming out of this session sometime next month.

Thank you for your time—and thank you for listening.

Before I end my remarks, I want to introduce the two nationally recognized researchers who will be facilitating our discussion today.

Dr. David DuBois is a professor in the Division of Community Health Sciences within the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago. His research examines the contribution of protective factors, particularly self-esteem and mentoring relationships, to resilience and holistic positive development; and on translating knowledge in this area to the design of effective youth programs. Dr. DuBois has authored numerous peer-reviewed studies on these topics, including two widely-cited meta-analyses of the effectiveness of youth mentoring programs. He is lead co-editor of the *Handbook of Youth Mentoring* and is co-author of multiple meta-analytic studies regarding the effectiveness of mentoring. Our Office has also had the pleasure of working with Dr. DuBois around its mentoring research, including the creation of a multisite demonstration program focused on advocacy and teaching in mentoring.

Dr. Roger Jarjoura recently joined the American Institutes of Research as a full-time principal researcher in the Human and Social Development Program. Previously, he spent 19 years as a faculty member in the Indiana University School of Public and Environmental Affairs, where he served as a fellow on Community Engagement and was recognized as a “Translating Research Into Practice” scholar. Dr. Jarjoura has served as an investigator on numerous evaluation studies, including an OJJDP-funded national process and outcome evaluation of a Boys and Girls Clubs of America Targeted Re-Entry program in four sites. Dr. Jarjoura has more than 16 years of experience in developing and evaluating mentoring programs, and is currently the Principal Investigator on the evaluation of our Office’s multisite mentoring demonstration program.

As you can tell, we are in excellent hands here today.

David and Roger, take it away.