

REMARKS

OF

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OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

AT THE

SECOND CHANCE ACT CONFERENCE

ON

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WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Mike [Thompson]. I'm delighted to be here at this Second Chance Conference with my colleagues, Denise [O'Donnell] and Melodee [Hanes] – and I'm honored to join the Attorney General. I think it's common knowledge by now that reentry is an issue of tremendous personal interest to Eric Holder. His presence today is evidence of his commitment. I look forward to introducing him shortly.

I also want to extend a warm welcome to Congressman [Danny] Davis. He's been a champion for Second Chance since the beginning, and I'm delighted he could be here today.

Finally, I want to thank Mike and the terrific staff at the Council of State Governments Justice Center for their partnership in our Second Chance efforts and for all they do to promote better corrections and public safety practices.

It's been remarkable to witness the way the issue of reentry has taken root in so many communities across the country. And it's impressive to see how, thanks to visionary leaders in the Administration, in Congress, and in the states, the topic has become so prominent on the nation's public safety agenda. Reentry is now a central part of the discussion about how to fight crime and keep communities safe.

But I think perhaps the most striking feature of this conversation about reentry is how broad and inclusive it has become. It hits everything from jobs and housing to veterans and health care and so many other areas. Reentry is no longer seen as just a criminal or juvenile justice issue – it touches almost every facet of our society.

I'm proud of the role the Office of Justice Programs has played – and continues to play – in advancing effective reentry. The Second Chance programs funded by our Bureau of Justice Assistance and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention have ensured that reentry has a foothold in hundreds of communities throughout America. The National Reentry Resource Center – supported by BJA and managed by the Council of State Governments Justice Center – is providing state-of-the-art assistance that can benefit states and localities. And OJP is leading the effort to staff the Federal Interagency Reentry Council, which is chaired by the Attorney General. I just attended the third meeting of the Council, and it was incredible to see the level of interest and the amount of progress being made.

So we're helping to establish viable reentry programs where they are needed, and we're also expanding the base of knowledge about what works. Our National Institute of Justice is supporting cutting-edge research to help us understand the impact of incarceration and the value of effective reentry strategies.

Through studies focusing on the link between criminal records and desistance from crime, NIJ is examining factors that can help smooth the path toward reintegration. The landmark redemption study – led by Al Blumstein and Kiminora Nakamura – looked at the possibility that there's a point at which a former offender who stays clean and arrest-free is no longer any more likely to commit a crime than a member of the general

public. It found, in fact, that there may well be such a point. According to the study, for young people and violent offenders, it's about eight years, but for those who are older when they first offend or commit less serious crimes, this point is reached in as little as three or four years. This has huge implications for the way employers should consider criminal records in their hiring decisions. This is so important given that more than 90 percent of U.S. employers perform criminal background checks on job applicants.

NIJ is also working closely with the American Bar Association to analyze the extent to which those who have been convicted in the past continue to be penalized by collateral consequences. The Attorney General has taken a particular – and very active – interest in this area.

And NIJ is helping to support what will surely be an historic National Research Council study to examine the causes and consequences of the dramatic increases in incarceration rates since the 1970s. The study will also look at both the costs and benefits of current sentencing policies and the evidence that alternative punishments might achieve comparable benefits at lower financial and social costs.

NIJ is also partnering with Denise and Melodee's offices to evaluate adult and juvenile reentry programs funded under Second Chance. Our goal is to find out the impact of these programs – how they're affecting re-arrests and returns to prison and jail; whether they're reducing new convictions and parole violations; and whether they're cost-effective. Three studies of adult reentry programs are underway already, and this year we're funding the first evaluation of juvenile Second Chance programs.

We're also working hard to get out to the field information about programs that have already been evaluated. Last year, we launched a what works clearinghouse called CrimeSolutions.gov that includes descriptions and ratings for a broad range of evidence-based programs, including reentry efforts. And as you just heard from Denise, the new What Works in Reentry Clearinghouse will go live at this conference. This new resource will greatly contribute to our collective knowledge base.

So we're using all the tools at our disposal to support innovative reentry programs, identify promising practices, and implement effective approaches. There are a lot of good things going on out there in your communities. With your help, we're accumulating new knowledge and experience daily. We need to leverage that information and use it to mainstream strong reentry practices throughout the country.

There's a lot we need to do, but we're making great progress. With the support of leaders in the Department of Justice, in the Administration, on Capitol Hill, and in your states and communities, we're moving closer to a day when effective reentry strategies are central to the way we do business.

As we all know, the success of reentry programs depends on the vision and commitment of government and community leaders – at the local, state, and federal

levels. We're extremely fortunate to have a visionary leading the Administration's reentry efforts.

Attorney General Eric Holder has been a true champion of effective reentry. Through the Federal Interagency Reentry Council, he's brought together Cabinet-level officials and other leaders from across the Administration to address our nation's reentry challenges. Having participated in the most recent Council meeting, I can tell you that the level of enthusiasm and energy among these high-level officials is tremendous. Much of that has to do with the commitment of the participants, but – and I know he'll deny this – a great deal of it has to do with his own enthusiasm, which is palpable.

I've known and worked with Eric Holder for many years, and I can tell you that reentry is an issue that he feels very strongly about. We're lucky to have such a committed and respected leader heading up our efforts. Please join me in welcoming the Attorney General of the United States.

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