

REMARKS

OF

THE HONORABLE KAROL V. MASON
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

AT THE

NATIONAL SUMMIT ON PREVENTING YOUTH VIOLENCE
OPENING

ON

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BALTIMORE, MD

Thank you, Theron, and good morning. I'm delighted to be here in Baltimore, and thrilled to join our distinguished speakers and guests for this fifth National Summit on Preventing Youth Violence. I'm especially happy, and honored, to be joined by Secretary King and our friend from the White House, Broderick Johnson, as well as Mayor Sam Liccardo, Mayor Libby Schaaf, and former Mayor of Philadelphia Michael Nutter. And this afternoon, I'll have the privilege of introducing my boss, Attorney General Lynch.

I want to begin by thanking everyone here for your commitment to reducing violence in your communities and for the work you're doing to expand opportunities for our young people. You have inspired us with your energy and commitment, and we're grateful for all you do and proud to be your partners.

We've got a busy day ahead, and I know you're all eager to hear from our speakers, but first I'd like to take just a moment to thank those who had a hand in organizing our program. First, I want to recognize our emcee – my Chief of Staff, Theron Pride – and my Senior Advisor, Ed Chung. Theron and Ed serve as the Justice Department's point people on the National Forum and they've done a masterful job bringing federal agencies together with our local partners.

I also want to say “thank you” to our outstanding team from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, starting with its visionary leader, Bob Listenbee, whom you'll hear from tomorrow morning. I'd like to single out two of his staff, Georgina Mendoza McDowell and Geroma Void. Georgina and Geroma are the ones who oversee the Forum's day-to-day activities and who handled the countless logistical matters that went into making this summit possible. They've done a superb job.

I also want to acknowledge our federal partners – both within and outside the Department of Justice, and on Capitol Hill. The commitment to this effort runs to the highest levels, and behind each of these leaders is a host of dedicated staff working hard to make our vision a reality.

And I want to thank everyone who's joined us from across the country for a real dialogue on how we can prevent youth violence. This includes the many young people who are here among our speakers and audience members. They bring a vital perspective to our work, and these three days will be richer for their participation. I also want to acknowledge that we have some outstanding men and women joining us for a research symposium on youth violence prevention starting later today. We owe so much to the knowledge and insights they bring to our work, and I'm eager to hear what they have to share.

To them, and to all of you, we're grateful for everything you do and very glad to have you with us today.

These are challenging times, here in Baltimore and in cities across the country. Crime rates are down nationally, a point that's always worth bearing in mind. But that

doesn't change the fact that some communities – and particularly, certain parts of those communities – are struggling.

We hear it in the news – homicides are up in some cities, violence is taking hold in places, we've even heard alarms about the coming of a new crime wave – a claim, by the way, that's backed by little if any evidence. But whatever the evidence shows, on some level what really matters is what you're seeing on the ground. And we know that what many of you see is a continuing cycle of displacement, disorder, and violence, much of it affecting our youth.

At the Department of Justice, we know how hard these problems hit you and your communities. We know you feel it more than anyone, because you're at the center of it all. We know it's easy to get discouraged and to feel like sometimes progress is stalling, or even being reversed. But I urge you not to become discouraged, because the work you're doing is making a difference. It's making a difference because it's helping our young people. It's making a difference because it's strengthening our communities. And it's making a difference because it's giving us hope that there's a way to turn the bad into good.

And we should never underestimate the power of hope. It was Dr. Martin Luther King who said that, "Even in the inevitable moments when all seems hopeless, men know that without hope they cannot really live." So remember that – remember that you are giving people a reason to carry on.

We'll hear throughout this summit the amazing things that are happening in cities across the country. The Attorney General will talk about it this afternoon – about some of the great progress you're all making. You're achieving remarkable things, and it's because you see the challenge of youth violence in a way that few others do. You recognize it as not just a law and order problem, but as a public health issue – one that demands a sophisticated and comprehensive response.

You know better than anyone that it's not a problem we can just arrest our way out of. You've shown us that enforcement needs to be balanced by effective prevention, intervention, and reentry. And you've proven that our approach must involve all stakeholders – our justice system agencies, our schools, our health and mental health providers, businesses, philanthropies, and members of the community.

The only way to meet the challenge of youth violence is by mobilizing all available resources and by addressing it, not just as a crime problem, but as a social problem, and as a chance to lift up our youth. That's how this Administration sees this issue – not simply as a crisis to be weathered but as an opportunity to give our youth the support they need and to move our communities forward.

The President launched My Brother's Keeper because he believes that every young person – no matter where they come from or what they look like – has a contribution to make. Our role – those of us in the federal government and those of you

in our communities – is to keep them on a safe, healthy path and to help them unlock their full potential.

And how do we do this? We do it by starting from a single premise – that violence is not inevitable. It's serious, it demands our urgent attention, but it is treatable and we can find solutions. Then we recognize that violence is the result of a number of inter-related factors – from poverty and poor health to substandard housing and school achievement gaps. We need to look at the root causes, not just the symptoms, the way any good medical professional would treat a disease.

After diagnosing the problem, we address it with evidence-based approaches that are tailored to the circumstances and designed to promote positive development. We use trauma-informed strategies to counter the effects of exposure to violence, so that we have a better chance of interrupting the cycle of harm. And we do all this together, by taking a common path through collective action.

We call this the Shared Framework, and it operates across all our initiatives – the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention, the Community-Based Violence Prevention program, and Defending Childhood. It has also informed our efforts to support male survivors of violence, led by our Office for Victims of Crime and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. We even see it in play in communities that aren't directly supported by the Justice Department.

And we see that it's working. Cities with intractable, seemingly unsolvable violence problems have reversed course in neighborhoods that were once overwhelmed by violence. It can be done, but it takes working together, working smartly – just as all of you are doing.

The road is a long one, as all of you know, and progress can be slow. You'll encounter barriers, resistance, setbacks. You'll become frustrated. You may even get discouraged at times. But remember that it's worth it. It's worth it because our young people are counting on us, and our communities depend on us. You're the bridge between the dark reality that too many of our kids face and the bright promise that can be their future. You're the difference between what is and what can be.

Now, I have the great privilege of introducing our next speaker.

Under the direction of my good friend, John King, the Department of Education has been one of the Justice Department's closest allies in reducing youth violence and expanding opportunities for our young people. First as Deputy Secretary and now as Secretary, he has made the full range of his Department's resources available to support our collective efforts.

I'm especially grateful for his leadership in addressing the school-to-prison pipeline and providing educational services to youth in correctional facilities. He has put the Department of Education front and center in this Administration's effort to support

our nation's youth. I'm delighted he could join us today. Please welcome Secretary of Education John King.

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