

REMARKS

OF

**MARY LOU LEARY
ACTING ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS**

AT THE

**NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK
AWARDS CEREMONY**

ON

**FRIDAY, APRIL 20, 2012
WASHINGTON, DC**

Thank you, Joye. I'm delighted to be here – and thrilled to have the Attorney General with us. Eric Holder has never missed this ceremony, which is a testament to his commitment to victims – and to the important work all of you are doing. He continues to make this event a priority, and we're glad he could join us again today.

I want to welcome another special guest – Tony West, the Acting Associate Attorney General. In the few weeks he's been in his position, he's given the Office of Justice Programs nothing but the strongest support – and I know his commitment extends to the work our Office for Victims of Crime is doing on behalf of our nation's victims and victim advocates.

Let me echo Joye's words of thanks to Kim Kelberg, Olivia Grew, and the rest of the fantastic OVC team for all their hard work in organizing this ceremony. They've done their usual outstanding job bringing it together. And I also want to thank Joye for her tremendous leadership. She has been such a passionate champion of crime victims and an outstanding advocate for victims' issues. We're very fortunate to have her on our side.

And, of course, I want to congratulate our amazing award recipients. This is just an incredible group of people who've done extraordinary work on behalf of crime victims. It's an honor to recognize them all.

As I reviewed the bios of our awardees, I was struck by how much the landscape of victim services has changed over the years. I've spent much of my career working with victims, in one way or another – as a local and federal prosecutor, in leadership at the Department of Justice, and as head of the National Center for Victims of Crime. I've had the privilege of watching the field grow from a small but powerful group of grass-roots organizations into an organized national network of advocates whose presence can be felt in all areas of the justice system.

For me, personally, working with victims has been the most rewarding aspect of my career, bar none. Nothing compares with the satisfaction of helping to restore a sense of dignity and safety to a crime victim – and nothing has greater impact. After all, who among us hasn't been a victim of crime or known someone who has? I think the most important goal anyone in criminal justice can strive for is to ensure that victims are heard and respected. It's not only about winning cases – it's about giving victims a voice.

I'm proud that I've been part of a team that's working hard to give all victims a voice. Through OVC's leadership – and with support from the highest levels of the Justice Department – we're supporting the work of victim service providers across the country – through training, through information resources, and through direct services. And I think our work has made a real difference.

But I also know we need to do more. Not every victim has access to services. Not every community has a place where victims can go for support. And where services do exist, victims don't always know about them. This year's theme for National Crime Victims' Rights Week – "Extending the Vision: Reaching Every Victim" – reflects that we still have work to do.

I'm pleased that we're working to answer this challenge. OVC has embarked on an ambitious – and very timely – effort to expand the vision and strengthen the impact of the victim services field. It's called Vision 21 – and the goal is nothing short of reframing the role of victim services in the 21st century.

The idea behind Vision 21 is to find out how we can meet the emerging challenges so many of us are seeing – as well as those enduring challenges that have been with us for so long but haven't received the level of attention they deserve.

Joye and her staff have met with stakeholders from across the country. They've combed through the literature to find out what we're doing right, what we could be doing better, and what gaps we need to plug to make sure victim services are comprehensive and accessible. We've found there are some systemic obstacles:

- Victims' rights are observed unevenly.
- Funding isn't sufficient.
- Collaboration with other parts of the justice and human services systems remains as a hurdle.
- And we haven't yet developed a robust body of research and evidence-based practices for practitioners to draw on.

We've also found we haven't done enough to meet certain specific needs. For instance, victims of violence in our inner cities still struggle to find services. Almost 30 years after the Victims of Crime Act was signed into law, too many people in our nation's most crime-ridden neighborhoods still have little if any place to go for help and support. It's time we address what can only be called an injustice – and put forth our best effort to make sure every victim is able to get the services he or she needs.

This begins, of course, with information. We need to know exactly who's getting services and why. To that end, at OVC's urging, I've approved a transfer of \$3 million from OVC to our Bureau of Justice Statistics to expand data collection under the National Crime Victimization Survey. We're looking to move beyond the raw numbers captured in the Survey to get basic descriptive information about victims, the services they receive, and their reasons for accessing services. We'll also collect more information from victim service agencies to learn more about these organizations – what kind of services they offer and how they're supported. Finally, we want to know why some people seek and receive services and others don't.

I think this will go a long way toward helping us identify the service gaps we all know exist. And it will help meet the ultimate goal of Vision 21, which is to give us a better handle on the challenges we're all facing and provide a framework for strategic change in the field.

I know OVC is hard at work on a final report for Vision 21, which we hope to release in the next two to three months. Once that report is out, we'll be using it as a roadmap for our own work, not just in OVC, but throughout OJP.

This is a time of change and growth in the victim services field. Although some of the challenges are familiar, we're in a different place than we were in 1984 when VOCA was passed. The work we're honoring here today reflects how far we've come. As we celebrate our progress – through the outstanding achievements of these heroes – let us find our inspiration in their hope for a better, more compassionate world – and let us work together to give every victim a voice.

I'm now very honored to introduce our keynote speaker – someone who is a friend to all of us in the victims field.

I've had the privilege of working with Eric Holder over many years – during our days in the U.S. Attorney's Office, during his days as the Deputy Attorney General under Janet Reno, and now as the Attorney General of the United States. I know first-hand that his commitment to victims is deep and personal.

As U.S. Attorney, he made his Victim-Witness staff a central part of his office's operations. As Deputy Attorney General, he laid the groundwork for a major effort to address children exposed to violence. And as Attorney General, he's continued his commitment to protecting kids. He's been a champion of victims in areas ranging from youth violence to human trafficking to financial fraud.

He's a distinguished career prosecutor and the nation's chief law enforcement officer – but at heart, he's a true victim advocate. It's an honor to have him with us once again today. Please welcome the Attorney General of the United States.

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