

REMARKS  
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

OF

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OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

AT THE

BYRNE CRIMINAL JUSTICE INNOVATION  
SYMPOSIUM

ON

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WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Tracey [Trautman]. I appreciate the opportunity to welcome everyone to this symposium. I want to thank Tracey, Betsi Griffith, Alissa Huntoon and our terrific team from the Bureau of Justice Assistance for all the hard work they've put into organizing this meeting, and for all they do to manage the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program.

I'd also like to thank Maurice Jones and his team at LISC, our training and technical assistance provider. I know Maurice has been a strong supporter of the BCJI program, and we appreciate his outstanding leadership. I'm also grateful to Julia Ryan, who oversees LISC's BCJI team. She and her colleagues have stood by us throughout this effort, drawing from their decades of experience to help us build and strengthen the BCJI model. Thank you all.

It's a privilege to host so many outstanding law enforcement professionals and community leaders who labor on behalf of the safety of our citizens. We know this isn't an easy job – it often seems like a thankless job – but I speak for all of us at the Office of Justice Programs when I say how much we appreciate your commitment to public safety in America.

As with any new Administration, I know there are lots of questions about priorities. The President just released his budget last week, and you can see that the White House is clearly focused on reducing crime in America's communities. That's good news for all us who care about public safety. I think it's also important for everyone here to know – and this will come as no surprise – that for our Attorney General, the safety of our communities, and of those who protect them, is paramount.

Attorney General Sessions has made it clear that he's willing to do what it takes to help cities reduce crime and violence. And having worked very closely with Jeff Sessions during his time in the Senate, I can tell you those are not empty words. For anyone who cares about making sure our neighborhoods are places of promise and opportunity – where citizens can live, work and thrive – you can be sure you have an ally in our Attorney General.

In his short time in office, he has already set up a task force on crime reduction and public safety. The goal of this task force is to work with federal, state and local law enforcement and community organizations to identify effective public safety strategies. As part of this effort, the Department plans to host a National Summit on Crime Reduction and Public Safety at the end of June. We hope to learn at that summit about local strategies that work and determine how we at the federal level can support those efforts.

The Attorney General is also taking action to respond to the President's executive order on preventing violence against law enforcement. Officer safety is a critical element of our mission at OJP, and under the direction of Attorney General Sessions, we are looking at ways we can expand this part of our portfolio. We fully understand that

keeping officers safe, protecting their health and sustaining their morale are vital to community safety.

Through initiatives like the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program, OJP has been doing a great deal to support local efforts – and the work all of you are doing in your cities and neighborhoods is making a big difference.

As you know, the BCJI program offers a unique approach to public safety and neighborhood revitalization. It's place-based, community-oriented, driven by data and research and grounded in partnerships across agencies and across disciplines – all the elements you would expect in a successful public safety program.

The BCJI model builds on programs like Project Safe Neighborhoods that rely on coordination between federal, state and local law enforcement and prosecutors and on collaboration with researchers. It focuses on crime hot spots, and on distressed areas where resources are most urgently needed. Perhaps most importantly, it brings community leaders and law enforcement to the table together, which guarantees that this work isn't being done in a vacuum.

This approach is not one we see often enough – which is a shame, because we know it works. In Evansville, Indiana, for example, from 2013 to 2015, reported crime dropped 42 percent in the BCJI target neighborhood of Jacobsville.

Five hot spots in Milwaukee's target area saw a 23 percent drop in violent crime over the same period. That's compared to a 1 percent increase in the city as a whole.

And in Austin, Texas, during the 16 months of BCJI operation in the Rundberg neighborhood, violent crime dropped 15 percent.

These are impressive numbers, and they're especially notable when many other cities are seeing a trend in the opposite direction.

But your efforts are affecting more than crime rates. You're improving overall quality of life for the citizens of your communities.

In Providence, Rhode Island, BCJI partners took out eight of the most crime-infested properties in the city and converted others into affordable housing. And in Charleston, West Virginia, a local bar known for attracting drugs and prostitution was shut down and replaced by a popular eatery.

Even beyond improving public safety and raising living standards, BCJI partners are demonstrating that police and citizens can work together to strengthen their neighborhoods. More than 100 residents were part of a community task force in Seattle that targets youth crime hot spots. And in Syracuse, partners initiated 20 different projects that brought people out of their homes to interact and build rapport with public safety officials.

All told, our Bureau of Justice Assistance has awarded more than \$42 million to 65 BCJI sites, and thanks to all of you, that investment has yielded dividends. Which is why I'm pleased to let you know that we are working on another round of grants. We expect to make up to 10 new BCJI awards in the coming months.

As I become familiar with the programs supported by OJP and hear success stories like the ones I've mentioned, it's clear to me that law enforcement professionals and community leaders across the nation are doing the good work that needs to be done. If you are at all representative of what's happening in the country at large, then we have every reason to be optimistic.

This work – the work that you're doing – is more important than ever. Crime rates remain near historically low levels, but there's no question that some cities are seeing troubling recent surges in violence – in some cases, dramatic increases. This is a time for vigilance, not complacency, because, as the Attorney General said, “When crime rates move in the wrong direction, they can move quickly.”

But we don't have to worry about complacency with this group. You have all shown yourselves to be devoted to the cause of a safe and more just America, and I am proud that OJP has been able to contribute to your success. I look forward to continuing our partnership and to sharing with the Attorney General the remarkable progress that I know you will make in the months ahead.

Thank you for your time, and I wish you all the best as you work to protect your citizens and your communities.

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