

REMARKS

OF

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AT THE

FEDERAL PARTNERS IN BULLYING PREVENTION
SUMMIT ON CYBERBULLYING PREVENTION

ON

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ROCKVILLE, MD

Thank you. I'm very glad to be here, and I'm thrilled to join so many federal partners, non-profit groups, social media representatives and youth to talk about an issue that demands our urgent, collective attention.

We all share the belief that no child should live in fear of intimidation, harassment or abuse. As you heard earlier, the First Lady is leading this administration's efforts to make the online world, and the world at large, a safer place for our kids. We all, every one of us, have a responsibility to create an environment that is free of threat and conducive to growth.

We know the tremendous harm that bullying can do – how it isolates its victims, makes them more vulnerable to drug abuse and self-harm and puts them at risk of both serious physical injury and long-term psychological trauma. We know that kids who are bullied are more likely to skip or drop out of school. They're more likely to get into fights, vandalize property and abuse others. All of which, sadly, makes it more likely that they will be arrested some day and become part of a cycle of juvenile delinquency and criminal offending.

In other words, the consequences of bullying are profound, and they have significant implications for public safety. The phenomenon of cyberbullying adds a new dimension to these risks, and it's critical that we understand and appreciate these added dangers.

Research supported by our National Institute of Justice found that 17 percent of youth reported at least one incident of harassment involving technology in the previous year. Other research shows that online harassment has gone up fairly steadily over the last decade. Given the proliferation of social media, that probably shouldn't surprise us.

We continue to learn how cyberbullying affects kids – what it does to their sense of safety and self-worth. We know that many of the tactics employed by online bullies resemble those used by traditional bullies. And there's no question that the viral repetition and widespread sharing involved in cyberbullying can magnify the damage and deepen the scars of its victims.

It's critical that we send a message that cyberbullying, and bullying of any kind, will not be tolerated. It's just as critical that we ensure a positive climate of learning and growth for our kids, wherever they are.

The Department of Justice is doing its part on both counts. I've already mentioned an example of the research work conducted by our National Institute of Justice. That work, part of a larger school safety effort, is ongoing.

We have a comprehensive evaluation underway – what we call a meta-analysis – to try to determine what types of programs are effective in reducing cyberbullying.

We're also giving kids skills and coping strategies for dealing with online bullies. Our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention helped our partners at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children create an online anti-cyberbullying tool called NetSmartz.

The Department's Community Relations Service has a great initiative called the School-SPIRIT program, which stands for Student Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together. School-SPIRIT empowers students to identify and address conflicts related to differences in race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability and religion.

Our network of 61 Internet Crimes Against Children task forces, whom you'll hear from in a moment, has been active in educating the public about Internet safety and the dangers of cyberbullying. Last year alone, they reached almost 1.5 million people through their training programs.

Finally, we're proud to be part of the Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention – proud to work alongside our many allies across the administration.

But we know that we are only one piece of the puzzle. Preventing cyberbullying begins, not with the government, but with families and communities. With parents and trusted adults modeling responsible behavior. With teachers working to create a climate of mutual respect. With community and religious leaders instilling the values of compassion and kindness. And with innovators and technology companies willing to take a stand against abusive conduct.

We all play a part in keeping our kids safe from online threats.

As a Justice Department official, and more importantly, as the mother of four children, I am grateful to you for the steps you are taking to protect our young people. I challenge you to keep up your good work, and to continue thinking deeply about how we can stamp out abusive online behavior and the instincts that drive it.

I thank you for putting our kids first, and for all you're doing to keep our communities, and our country, safe.

Thank you.

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