

REMARKS
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

OF

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AT THE

FIGHTING THE OPIOID CRISIS:
CONVENING POLICE LEADERS AND RESEARCHERS
TO LEARN PROMISING PRACTICES AND
TO INFORM A RESEARCH AGENDA

ON

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WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Attorney General Sessions. We appreciate your leadership and commitment to reversing the opioid crisis in America, and your continued dedication, evident by your presence and your inspiring remarks here today, to expand and fine tune the Department's efforts to solve this crisis through prevention, enforcement and treatment.

Thank you for supporting the National Institute of Justice's "Fighting the Opioid Crisis" convening and helping us get the day off to such a great start.

I'm pleased that the Attorney General was here to help us kick off our deliberations. You heard his message, and it was clear: the Department of Justice is pulling out all the stops to fight this epidemic. He is directing a full-scale assault on the opioid crisis, using all the means at his disposal to go after drug traffickers, disrupt the supply chain, support our law enforcement officers and help the victims of this epidemic.

He is sending a strong message to criminals here and abroad that this Department of Justice will not tolerate any criminal act that perpetuates this crisis. But I know he would like nothing more than to find a way out of the crisis altogether, using the latest research and best practices.

Today's convening is both timely and important. We're here to discuss one of the most serious public safety and public health issues of our time, and to explore what can be done about it. The Attorney General framed the opioid crisis as a national emergency that demands our urgent attention. I wager that no one here would disagree.

Our hope for this meeting is that through the collective wisdom and experience represented here, we can update our blueprint for understanding and, ultimately, resolving this crisis. Of course, we know that answers to complex problems don't always come easily or quickly, but I'm hopeful that our conversation today and tomorrow will put us well on the path to the most effective solutions.

I'm a seventh-generation Iowan. I served as a federal prosecutor there and I recently left private practice in Cedar Rapids to join the Office of Justice Programs. We're relatively fortunate in my home state that the opioid emergency hasn't taken the same destructive toll it's taken in other states. But we have by no means escaped it.

According to the National Institutes of Health, heroin overdose deaths in Iowa more than tripled from 2012 to 2016. The number of synthetic opioid-related deaths rose more than one-and-a-half times during the same period. So even in a state where measures of opioid abuse are below the national average, these drugs still are exerting a dangerous and deadly influence.

I saw an early glimpse of this crisis as a U.S. Attorney. In the summer of 2009, my office closed a six-year investigation into an Internet prescription drug operation. The case started when local police answered a call from a concerned citizen calling about a

pharmacy in Dubuque. Authorities learned that a California woman had been prescribed 90 diet pills by a doctor in Mississippi – the first phony prescription that we uncovered.

The case ended half-a-dozen years later after more than 30 million pain killers and other drugs had been illegally dispensed through 500,000 phony prescriptions. Twenty-five people were convicted, including 19 doctors – none of them in Iowa – and we recovered \$7 million from two online pharmacies and the other defendants. We were able to share more than \$4 million of the recovered funds with local law enforcement in Iowa.

It was a record case at the time, but it turned out to be just an early warning signal of the larger crisis that lay ahead, one that, as the Attorney General mentioned, would claim thousands upon thousands of lives.

The problem, as we know, has taken hold in communities across America, destroying families, decimating neighborhoods, and depriving our country of valued citizens. We can't afford to let this continue. The time to act is now – and our challenge here today is to determine the next best course of action to take.

I want to thank David [Muhlhausen] and his staff for taking up this challenge. In particular, I want to thank Steve Schuetz, NIJ's lead on this project. Steve, thank you for spearheading this effort.

And finally, I want to thank everyone in this room for taking the time out of your schedules to be here, and for your commitment to solving one of the most serious problems our country faces today.

I thank you all in advance for your contributions, and I look forward to the outcome of your discussions.

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