

REMARKS  
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

OF

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AT THE

THE NATIONAL MENTORING SUMMIT

ON

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WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you. I'm so excited to be here this morning. It's wonderful to see so many people, from so many communities, here to support and guide our young people.

I want to start by thanking each and every one of you, on behalf of our Attorney General, for the incredible work you are all doing to help kids reach their potential and achieve their goals. The Department of Justice is grateful for everything you're doing to help them become the law-abiding citizens and the great contributors we all know they can be.

I'd also like to acknowledge and thank our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and in particular Caren Harp, its Administrator, who joins me today. Caren and her team are working very hard to strengthen our nation's juvenile justice system and support those who come into contact with it. Their mentoring programs are a vital part of that work. On behalf of both of us, let me say that the Office of Justice Programs is very honored to once again participate in the National Mentoring Summit – and we are proud, very proud, to continue our relationship with the wonderful organizations represented here today.

I am, and have always been, a huge believer in the power of mentoring. What better way to ensure that young people are taking the right path than to connect them to people who have successfully navigated that same path? When done right, it's as good a prevention tool as any I know of, which is why OJP has supported mentoring programs for more than two decades. So many amazing, committed volunteers have helped youth find their talents, their purpose and a way to make a difference.

We're particularly proud of our work with MENTOR to support the OJJDP National Mentoring Resource Center. Last year alone, the Center provided training and other support to 362 school-, community- and faith-based mentoring programs that served more than 79,000 youth nationwide, thanks to funding from OJJDP.

There are so many outstanding mentoring programs out there, run by some great organizations – groups like the Cal Ripken Senior Foundation and Boys and Girls Clubs of America, which supports over 200 Native American programs.

One of the really impressive mentoring efforts is the Bigs in Blue initiative, run by our friends at Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. You know, we hear so much about the tension between law enforcement and the communities they serve, especially in higher-crime neighborhoods. Too often, we overlook the wonderful relationships that police and sheriffs' departments have formed with youth in their jurisdictions.

I had the privilege of visiting the Bigs in Blue program in Tampa a few months ago. They are doing some great things there. Nearly 40 law enforcement officers are matched with elementary school students in Hillsborough County, and the program had the Florida Attorney General at a Bigs in Blue Summit last June.

Down the road in Miami is another terrific Bigs in Blue program, where they've been able to make 33 mentoring matches. As part of that same effort, the Coral Gables police offer one-on-one mentoring to middle school students, and they've got a fantastic initiative called the FOOTBALL UNITES Bigs in Blue program that gave the Miami Dolphins rookie class the chance to participate as mentors.

We are very proud to help support this incredible program, and we're proud to support other national mentoring programs through the Police Athletic League and Friends of the Children. With funding from OJJDP, these two great organizations are working to reach youth at risk for delinquency, victimization and substance abuse – and they are making a special effort to connect with young people affected by opioids.

And because we know the opioid crisis is hitting rural communities particularly hard, we're working to make mentoring funds available in those underserved jurisdictions. For example, through an OJJDP grant, the Mentor Connector in Vermont, in partnership with the Rutland Regional Medical Center, is providing mentors to youth in one of the states hit hardest by this epidemic. They have an intake system set up to identify young people who live with opioid users, and the hope is to reach 180 high-risk youth through a combination of one-on-one mentoring, group mentoring and family mentoring.

I'm really excited about these programs, and I'm particularly excited about the work we're doing to help law enforcement connect with youth. Young people are getting the guidance of trusted law enforcement professionals, and police gain the confidence of the young citizens they serve. We need to let people know the value of these programs. And in fact, over the next several months, I will have the privilege of serving as Vice Chair of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice. We were just given our charge by the Attorney General last week, and one of our objectives is to explore how we can promote public confidence and respect for law enforcement – and for the law generally. I think law enforcement mentoring can be a big part of our answer, and I'm looking forward to working with the other commissioners to find out how we can tap these incredible resources.

In the meantime, we will keep giving our full support to mentoring initiatives throughout the nation. Last year, Caren's office awarded more than \$83 million in mentoring grants to fund a variety of mentoring efforts, including programs that focus on youth affected by the ongoing opioid crisis.

We know that there's a tremendous need for these programs. Kids are challenged in so many ways, by so many competing demands. Sometimes, what they need is a picture of success that they can aspire to and a model of care and compassion to help them along. That's what mentors do. That's what all of you do. And we are so very grateful. Thank you all for being that positive influence in the lives of our children, and thank you for all you do to make the future brighter for America's youth.

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