



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF

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ATTORNEY GENERAL

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND HUMAN RESOURCES

UNITED STATES SENATE

CONCERNING

PREVENTION PROGRAMS IN THE CRIME BILL

PRESENTED ON

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Chairman Kennedy, Senators Kassebaum and Dodd, members of the Labor and Human Resources Committee, it is a privilege to be with you today to speak about one of the key elements of the President's anti-crime effort -- workable and effective prevention programs.

I believe that we are at one of those rare points in history when a bipartisan consensus develops regarding what needs to be done to address a critical national problem. The problem is crime, and, while we will continue to debate the details, a consensus is emerging that any anti-crime strategy requires a balance between law enforcement, certain and appropriately severe punishment, and strenuous efforts to keep young people from beginning on the path of crime and diverting those who have begun down that path.

Over the past few months, I travelled across this country, talked to so many different people, walked through so many different neighborhoods, and heard from so many extraordinarily wonderful Americans. I went to speak with them about crime and what we could do about it and how the crime bill could have an impact. Everywhere I went, I heard the same message, loud and clear: The people want action. We need to pass the President's crime bill now.

We have a tremendous opportunity before us. The President has put forward a plan to fight crime. A plan that adopts the growing national consensus that effective anti-crime efforts must be balanced to simultaneously address enforcement and prevention in a

coordinated, integrated fashion. A plan that is largely reflected in the provisions of the Senate and House Crime Bills.

It is our hope that in the near future the Conference Committee will reconcile these two measures and send to the President one of the most comprehensive crime control bills in years. It is time to give law enforcement and the American people the tools they need to fight and prevent crime.

The key components of the President's anti-crime program are police, punishment and prevention.

- We must put more police on the nation's streets and get all our police to work in partnership with their communities to reduce and prevent crime;
- We must assure that convicted violent, repeat criminals are punished swiftly and severely and that other offenders, particularly first time offenders, receive certain appropriate punishment so that they learn that crime does not pay;
- We must guarantee that we have in place effective crime and drug prevention programs that will give young people something to which they can say yes.

Before turning specifically to today's topic of prevention programs, I would like to highlight what we are doing in the other areas of policing and punishment. I want to take this opportunity because I believe its important to emphasize continually that an effective crime fighting program requires all three elements -- we need to speak of each at every opportunity.

MORE POLICE OFFICERS AND COMMUNITY POLICING

The cornerstone of the President's crime plan is his commitment to putting 100,000 more cops on the beat in American cities and towns over the next five years.

Now, some are arguing that America's towns and cities do not want or cannot afford these new officers. I think those who make this argument are out of touch with the situation around the country. As you know, the President's successful Jobs Bill included one hundred and fifty million dollars (\$150 million) to help communities hire more police officers.

The response from around the country was overwhelming. Indeed, the Department of Justice received in excess of 2700 applications from communities around the country to help hire approximately 2023 officers. Just last week, we announced the third and final round of grant awards. It was a very competitive process because so many jurisdictions across this country presented such a compelling need for more officers and such good plans for deploying them to work in partnership with their communities to prevent and reduce crime.

Every place I have traveled since the program was begun nearly the first question I get from local officials is when will they get their new officers. This is hardly the reaction of communities that don't want federal help to hire more officers.

CERTAIN PUNISHMENT THAT FITS THE CRIME

In addition to putting more officers on the streets, we need to back our police officers, prosecutors and judges by providing

for swift and severe punishment for violent, chronic offenders, as well as certain and appropriate punishment for all who commit crimes. The pending Crime Bills provide many of the necessary elements of improved punishment:

- Creation of a targeted "three strikes you're out" provision focusing upon the repeat violent offenders who commit so much of the crime that plagues our communities and establishing the principle that those who will not stop preying on our communities will not be released back into those communities;
- Helping the states to expand correctional and detention space necessary to insure that no violent offender is ever released early for lack of a prison or jail cell;
- Reestablishment of a workable, constitutional death penalty for the most heinous crimes; and
- Fostering creative intermediate sanctions, such as boot camps, that provide first time offenders with both punishment, so that they can learn that society will not tolerate criminal behavior, and the education, training, discipline and treatment, when necessary, that can enable them to take advantage of the opportunity to begin anew.

PREVENTION

The crime bills that will soon be reconciled in Conference will put more police on our streets and provide swift and severe punishment for violent offenders. But, it will also steer young

people away from crime and drugs, giving them instead, as the President has said, "something to say yes to."

The bipartisan consensus that is developing over the need for prevention programs provides us with both a great opportunity and a great responsibility.

We have the opportunity to develop and nurture crime prevention programs for young Americans through employment, recreational and educational opportunities.

We have the opportunity to break the cycle of violence -- a cycle that so often begins with children seeing violence against their mothers by family members -- by doing something serious about domestic violence and other forms of violence against women.

The Crime bills passed by the Senate and House contain numerous programs which take advantage of the opportunity presented by the growing consensus that we must seek to prevent crime.

I would like to highlight briefly some of the prevention programs in the crime bill:

- The President's Youth Employment Skills program "Y.E.S." contained in the House bill will give young people something other than crime to say yes to by providing employment and skills to young people in hard-hit, high-crime areas. The young people of America want to be involved. They want to contribute, and to work to build a better future for themselves and their families. This very special, highly targeted crime prevention program will give them

a chance to do so. We believe that this program should be funded at \$1 billion.

- The Ounce of Prevention programs, sponsored by Senator Dodd in the Senate Crime Bill and also included in the House Bill, can provide, with some adjustment, a terrific mechanism for coordinating and effectively integrating the delivery of the federal government's new youth development and youth oriented crime prevention initiatives. These Ounce of Prevention Programs, which include YES, would include among other things, programs to establish community centers in the schools for after hours and expand other after school activities, such as Boys and Girls Clubs, that keep kids safely off the streets. It will also cover substance abuse treatment and prevention programs authorized in the Public Health Service Act including outreach programs for at-risk families.
- The Police Partnerships for Children program in both the Senate and House bills encourages police officers to become involved with children and family services agencies to divert at risk children.
- Drug Court programs which will support intensive court supervision of drug dependent defendants to provide the carrot-and-stick approach that can help them beat their addiction.
- The Gang Resistance Education and Training program

("G.R.E.A.T.") which has already proven its success, will help kids fight the allure of gang membership.

Prevention programs make sense, and are a critical part of any balanced attack on the crime, violence, and drug abuse that plague our cities, towns, neighborhoods, and rural communities. However, in order to insure that these programs both have meaningful impact and are cost-effective, we must insist that they be coordinated and integrated and that we have the flexibility and tools necessary to avoid duplication and wasted effort.

With this in mind, let me specifically discuss the importance of the Ounce of Prevention programs. The Administration strongly supports the creation of an Ounce of Prevention Council. One of the goals of this Administration in its anti-crime agenda is to eliminate the turf wars amongst the Federal agencies. A strong Ounce of Prevention Council will reduce duplication, waste and bureaucratic infighting by coordinating the various youth development and crime prevention programs in the bills. This Council is also essential to insure that money we spend on crime prevention is spent well. To achieve such a strong Council, we recommend some revisions that we believe are necessary to facilitate better administration and coordination of certain of the proposed youth-oriented prevention programs contained in the House and Senate crime bills.

Specifically, the Administration recommends that the President be authorized to designate the chair of a slightly reformulated

cabinet level Council. The membership of the Ounce of Prevention Council should include the Attorney General, the Secretaries of the Departments of Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Education, Agriculture, Interior, and the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and one or more other officials as the President may deem appropriate.

The interdepartmental Council should be authorized to help maximize the impact of the crime bill's youth oriented crime prevention initiatives through collaboration and consultation with other agencies and entities, coordinated planning, development of a computer-based catalog, technical assistance, and other program integration and grant simplification strategies. The Council's direct funding should be authorized at the House level. Furthermore, we recommend that the Council be authorized to accept and to help administer specified related program funds upon request by the relevant agency. We look forward to working with members of this Committee and the Conference Committee to implement these revisions.

The activities to be supported by the Ounce of Prevention are simple and workable. Let me give you one example: the Community Schools Initiative contained in the Ounce of Prevention. Children face the greatest risks after school, on weekends, and during school vacations -- when they are idle and their parents are at work or not around. It is during these hours that kids fall prey to drugs and crime. A recent study found that eighth graders who were unsupervised for 11 or more hours a week were twice as likely

to abuse drugs or alcohol as those who had adult supervision. Boredom and isolation may also be the best recruitment devices that violent gangs have.

Through recreation and organized sports and other activities, young people can develop self-esteem, learn to play by the rules and experience the thrill of playing fair. We have resources available in every neighborhood, now, to use for this purpose: \$250 billion worth of public school buildings and facilities. The problem is that these schools are generally open only seven hours a day, and often for only 180 days a year. These valuable classrooms, gymnasiums, swimming pools, libraries and other facilities are off-limits to our young people most afternoons and evenings.

If we keep these schools open, they can bring the community together and provide the space for activities, learning and a safe place to be a kid. The Community Schools Initiative of the Ounce of Prevention Program will provide grants to communities across the country to develop and implement an after-school plan for their youth, drawing together parents, clergy, social workers, teachers, youth groups, community and business leaders and local officials.

Unfortunately, many of the poorest communities -- the very communities that need after-school programs the most -- do not have the resources to put these programs in place without our help. That is why the Ounce of Prevention's Community School's Initiative is so important. It targets grant funds to those neighborhoods

where many families live below the poverty line and there is a high rate of youth violence.

The Community School's Initiative is just one example of what we can do with the Ounce of Prevention programs. It demonstrates that crime prevention ideas are there waiting for us to act.

CONCLUSION

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before the Committee to discuss the Administration's view on the crime bill prevention programs. The crime bill includes the largest, most comprehensive violence prevention programs in our Nation's history. It is time to move forward and take advantage of the opportunity presented to us by sending a crime bill to the President.