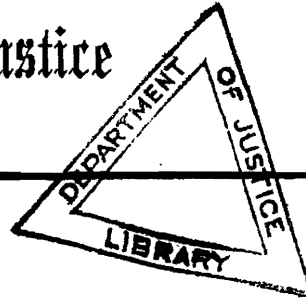




Department of Justice

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STATEMENT

OF THE

HONORABLE ROBERT F. KENNEDY

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE

SUB-COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

OF THE

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR

ON H.R. 7178

July 12, 1961

I am pleased to have this chance to urge your approval of the proposed legislation (H.R. 7178). Our failure as a Nation to halt the rising tide of law violation among our young people is a matter of serious national concern. The Committee should be especially commended for moving so quickly from the complex problems of education to the serious and grave problem of delinquency.

We have talked a lot about preventing delinquency but have not acted with equal vigor. Action rather than debate is what we need now. The facts are clear and threatening. We know that delinquency is growing faster every year, and at a rate faster than the youth population. We know that the big population jump in the age group from 10 to 21 is just ahead.

We have been warned repeatedly that our police, judicial and correctional facilities are inadequate to effectively handle the increasing number of law violations.

Despite these facts, our new expenditures, at all levels of government, are mainly for bigger enforcement and correctional programs. I do not object at all to more police, improved court procedures, or more effective treatment facilities. Crime has to be repressed and communities must be protected. Offenders have to be controlled and reformed. The better we can do these jobs, the more chance we have of keeping first offenders from becoming hardened criminals. If we were successful in this alone, we could cut our national crime costs enormously.

But we should be pouring as much, or even more, money, manpower and imagination into preventing those early law violations that start criminal careers.

The principal business of the Justice Department is enforcement and prosecution. But in this matter I feel we must take a broader view. We can go on building up our criminal justice system to deal with the end-products of crime producing conditions. In fact, we have no choice as long as the number of offenders continues to increase. But we can not win the battle by these means alone.

In the last 30 years, much has been learned about detecting conditions which lead young people into criminal activities. In many communities large and small throughout the United States, some effective action is being taken. The knowledge and resources are scattered, however. The problem is to spread greater awareness of what is being done and what can be done; to increase the resources, particularly in trained personnel, for more effective action; and to bring such resources together in the same community. These tasks are the goals toward which this legislation will move us.

In the cases that come before the Department of Justice involving a wide range of unlawful activities, we see repeated evidence of family and community failures.

Let me tell you about a young man, now serving a term of 20 years in a Federal prison.

From the age of nine he was involved in burglaries. He stole a gun at ten but was caught before he could use it. His offenses grew more serious. Probation, training schools and parole were tried by various agencies, but all of these efforts failed. As a juvenile he was arrested 10 times, made a ward of the court on two occasions and committed to correctional schools four times.

He married at 18, but was not prepared to settle down. With his poor training he could only get temporary work as a common laborer. Before he was 21, he had planned and executed several armed robberies.

In prison he was found to be nearly illiterate. In fact, previous institutions had classified him as having sub-normal intelligence. However, in less than a year, he completed elementary school.

Now he is doing well in high school at the prison and making rapid progress on learning a trade as a skilled technician. Clearly enough, motivation and opportunity, not intelligence, had been missing before.

This case is striking because of the dramatic response to treatment. But there is nothing unusual about the constructive potential in this young man that had never been tapped before. That part of the story could be duplicated in thousands of cases from the files in prisons and jails across the country.

The real tragedy in this particular case is that a Federal conviction for a major crime had to occur before an intensive effort was made to straighten out this young man's problems. How much better it would have been if there had been the care and resources to do the same thing for him at the age of nine or ten?

In this particular case, over a four-year period, the proceeds of the crimes, and the expense of arrest, conviction, confinement, and treatment have cost society close to \$100,000. Nor is this the end. He is not yet ready for release.

The more closely one looks at the cost and deployment of our crime prevention efforts, the more apparent it becomes that we have put too much responsibility at the end of the line, rather than the beginning. Enforcement and correction can only do part of the job.

In this proposed legislation the costs of its exploratory program of training, technical assistance and demonstration are estimated at \$10 million a year. Contrast this request with figures on custodial care alone. A survey of 196 public and 78 private training schools in this country with a population of 40,000 children gives the following figures:

Current operating budgets run more than \$61 million, and an additional \$32 million a year is needed to bring services up to proper standards.

Over a five-year period, it is estimated that another \$135 million will be needed for capital improvements.

In the Federal Bureau of Prisons budget, \$6 million will be needed to replace the current facilities of the national training school which houses 450 boys. In the country-wide survey, the average annual cost of institutional services per child is about \$3,000, money enough, I might say, to pay his way in a university.

The Federal commitment to delinquency prevention in the proposed bill cannot compare with these costs. Clearly, it is not going to solve the problem either. But it can stimulate local community interest and investment in finding out how to do a better job of prevention. With this money we can encourage development of programs that are effective and we can get this knowledge to those who need it.

We face a severe challenge. Daily before our eyes there is a growing army of unemployed and out-of-school youth. The challenge is to create new and meaningful opportunities for those young people.

If we ignore this challenge we invite the discontented and deprived to search for other solutions. I have seen some of these solutions:

There are the young hoodlums who think of nothing but getting into the rackets.

There are those who turn instead to theft, burglary and shoplifting as a career.

There are even those unfortunates who become addicted to narcotics before they are out of their teens.

I have seen these young on the streets and in the prisons. I don't like what I have seen.

The job of providing constructive and challenging opportunities for young people throughout the Nation is every citizen's business. This is not a matter for partisan political interest. We can not say it is the responsibility of somebody else. It is not just a problem of inadequate parents or an indifferent community. Many families and communities show the effects of economic and racial discrimination beyond their control.

Nor can the residents of suburbs, rural areas, and small towns lay the problem to the corruption of the big city and refuse to help. Their children go to work and live in these cities in a steady migration. And the problems of the inner city have an infectious way of spreading outward. Mr. Hoover tells me that crimes are now increasing just as fast in rural areas and small towns as in the city. Back there in the inner city where delinquency rates are still highest is the place to stop this trend.

The proposed legislation gives the Federal Government a chance to help local communities find ways to aid young people before they are involved in serious trouble. In his testimony before this Committee, my colleague, Secretary Ribicoff has suggested some of the directions we might take. The major changes in opportunities for young people will be achieved through basic legislation in the areas of education, housing and labor. However, with these funds for delinquency prevention, we shall try to create new avenues by which the young people in trouble also can share in the expanding number of lawful opportunities.

Giving young people a genuine chance to succeed legitimately can work miracles in heading off trouble. I heard just the other day of a revealing case. It concerns a young man, now 20 years of age, who had been a leader of a large fighting gang in a big city. He served as war counselor, and then president of the club. For six years he carried a gun. He guided his group to a reputation for violence that struck fear in the hearts of adults and children alike.

Through the intervention of an Episcopal priest, the situation changed. The priest spent a great deal of time getting to know this leader and his cohorts. He counseled the young man in all sorts of troubles. He encouraged him to keep up his studies at school. Eventually, he got him a scholarship to college. This former gang leader was headed straight for a life of crime.

Today he is an eager and intelligent college student. He still has plenty of spunk. But now he is studying psychology, sociology,

and law so that he can help others as the priest helped him.

Youth gang workers have been sent out in local communities to make contact with these young people who have become isolated from constructive influences. I have been deeply impressed with the courage and dedication of these workers. They are doing their job.

Our job is to create genuine opportunities for the young people they reach.

With this legislation we can discover how these opportunities can be developed and what it takes to do it. As Secretary Ribicoff noted in his testimony, there are many good programs already being tried in different parts of the country. There are many new ideas being proposed. Our job is to help put these scattered programs together, so their full impact can be felt.

In the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crimes we have a means for mobilizing Federal resources to meet this challenge. Throughout the country we must encourage agencies to get together to make these new programs work. This is important. We need to forget about personal interests or agency interests and get the job done.

On the President's Committee, Secretary Goldberg, Secretary Ribicoff and I are determined to pull together. No one agency can do this job alone. We shall keep our eyes on the goal. We shall have no patience with jurisdictional quarrels that keep us from reaching it.

Our goal is to assist local communities in their efforts to coordinate and develop their resources for preventing delinquency. This bill will be an important resource in doing this successfully. As Chairman of the President's Committee, I urge you to approve this legislation.