

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

JUVENILE JUSTICE SUMMIT

Sponsored by

THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Address by

THE HONORABLE JANET RENO

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

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P R O C E E D I N G S

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Thank you very much, Attorney General Curran, Lieutenant Governor Townsend, President Miller, Speaker Taylor, and all the distinguished people here today, it is a very high honor and privilege for me to be with you today.

I have enjoyed Maryland in these last three years. I have been to Point Lookout. I went about 72 miles up the tow path headed towards Cumberland. I've seen so much of your beautiful state and you have made me feel so welcome.

I have seen your young people in action. Just last week at Eleanor Roosevelt High School, I saw young people speak out in thoughtful ways.

At Mount Airy Elementary and Middle School, I had a chance to take questions from students and I understand how much they want to be part of what's going on, how much they want to make the difference, how much they want to be somebody.

I have had a chance to talk with young people in Baltimore as I walked the streets with community police officers. You are doing so many exciting things, and this is another step today in what I think indicates Maryland's leadership in this area.

That you would pull together this Summit, that you would focus on what we can do about what I think is one of the most difficult problems in America today is a tribute to all of you in the state who care about people.

In these last years, we have seen violence in this country go down slightly. Between 1990 and 94, the crime rate for adults dropped by about 2 percent, and the murder rate last year dropped by 12 percent. However, while adult crime rates have been falling, we can't say the same about juvenile crime. During the same period, the juvenile crime

rate shot up by about 21 percent.

Beginning in 1985, we saw the juvenile violence rate begin to climb in this country. That was disturbing, because the number of young people was declining slightly; beginning about 1991, however, the number of young people began to grow in America and it will grow substantially in these next ten years. Unless we do something about violence, unless we do something about alcohol and drug abuse, the problem is only going to become more acute.

The Carnegie Foundation has studied the problem of adolescence and points out that by the age of 17, about a quarter of all adolescents have engaged in behaviors that are harmful or dangerous to themselves or others, getting pregnant, using drugs, taking part in antisocial activities, failing in school. Altogether, nearly half of American adolescents are at high or moderate risk of seriously damaging their life's chances. Damage may be near term and vivid or it may be delayed like a time bomb set in youth. Thus we come together here to see what can we do together.

I never liked the Feds who came to town and said, told me, "This is what you should do." I liked those that came to town and said, "How can we work together as a partner?"

You on the front lines in Maryland know what you need more than we do in Washington, but how can we complement, support you, assist you, provide technical expertise, share with you what is working in other communities, share with you what other states are doing, and that's what we are about today.

I was so encouraged after we held with the National Conference of State Legislatures, after we held a leadership forum in Florida in December of '95, to hear that you all were energized by this effort and that we were following through. And I'm impressed with the legislation that has been produced out of that and I am impressed with the fact that you would come together to again seek how we can focus our efforts.

Lieutenant Governor Townsend, it was wonderful to work with you on juvenile justice issues before you took office. And what I hope to do is to continue to build on what we have started and make Maryland a model state, a model for how you comprehensively sensibly focus on the problems of juvenile crime in America.

It becomes more difficult because we face funding cuts in Washington as you face funding cuts in the juvenile justice area, but I have seen something happen across the nation. As a prosecutor in Miami, I watched the federal government shift programs to the state but didn't send them the money, and then the state started shifting programs to the community and it didn't have any money to send with it. The more I saw, I noticed both state and community starting to work together to figure out how they could use their resources in the wisest way possible, I saw people begin to innovate. I saw them, instead of saying, "We need more money to do this," figure out how they got the job done, because it was so important to protect our children and protect our communities.

So I think the federal government working with the State of Maryland, working with the wonderful communities that you have across the state, can again prove that we can do the job.

It's not just urban Prince George's County or Baltimore; it's the rural counties that face the same challenge and the same problems, and sometimes their problems are exacerbated because of the distance required to get people to services or treatments that are so necessary. So let us begin today to see what we can do as partners to provide a shining example for this country as to what to do about children.

We have provided some support and assistance along the way in terms of community police officers who are now at work throughout Maryland as part of the President's efforts to put

100,000 community police officers on the streets of America. Maryland has already received a \$126,000 downpayment on the Violence Against Women grants, and hopefully as Congress moves towards the passage of more permanent funding for the Department of Justice, we can continue this effort.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has been working with Maryland authorities and our antiviolence initiative again is a model for how we should be partners in focusing on this effort.

What could I suggest the state could do? And it is a suggestion; it is not a dictate. It is an opportunity to begin a dialogue in the discussions.

First, I think probably almost every police agency represented here would echo what the Attorney General said: We have got to keep kids out of trouble. We have got to keep them away from crime in the first place.

As a prosecutor, I would pick up a key sentence investigation of a young man that I prosecuted, a 16-year old for armed robbery. I can identify five points along the way where if we had been able to intervene early, we probably could have kept that kid out of trouble forever and never let him see a juvenile court. But we have failed, because we would rather invest in crises than make an investment in a child up front. So I think it is important that we focus on building, like we build a house, we put the blocks together. We put in the best materials; early childhood is absolutely essential.

And you ask what is the Attorney General of the United States talking about juvenile justice and early childhood? Early childhood is so critical, because as I tried to figure out what to do about crack involved infants and their mothers, the doctors taught me that the first three years of life were the most important, that that's when the child learned the concept of award and of punishment and developing a conscience.

All that Maryland spends, 18 years from

now won't mean anything if the child doesn't learn what punishment is about up front. We'll waste money in remedial education ten years from now unless we realize 50 percent of all learned human responses are learned in the first year of life, and that's the time to build a foundation for education. Safe educare, after school and in the evening for parents who must work, is absolutely critical. But one of the areas I think is important we focus on together is the whole problem of child abuse and neglect. The statistics are in, studies are clear, the child who is abused, the child who is neglected as an infant or as a child, small child, often becomes the abuser as he grows older, often becomes the more violent of offenders as he grows older.

Child abuse and neglect is one of the most difficult issues to deal with. But just think what we could do if we develop a capacity, both the community, police officers with public health nurses, counselors in the community, to form a team focused on community problems, amongst them child abuse. Just think what we can do if we provide trained professionals to work with them who identify the problems of their abuse and can take corrective action.

Sometimes it is not malice that promotes the abuse; sometimes it is the single parent with four children who has reached the end of her rope and just can't cope. Let's develop family preservation units to make a difference. But let us understand, statistics tell us clearly that child abuse can only perpetuate itself in a further cycle of violence. And if you can look for indicators that can make a difference, that's one.

Another clear indicator that can make the difference is the whole problem of family violence and domestic violence. The American Psychological Association just issued a report which I commend for your consideration; fighting between parents can be very harmful even if the children are not the victims of the abuse. For the most part, violent behavior is learned and one of the most

potent classrooms is the home.

Unless we start doing something about violence in the home, we are never going to end it on the streets or in the communities of this nation, and we would like to work with you in our Violence Against Women Office to make sure we share with you the technical expertise that is so critical in the implementation of these grant moneys you have and will be receiving. If we are strapped for money, if we want to make sure that we are not spread too thin, at least let us make sure that we try positive thoughtful interventions in homes that are racked by domestic violence where there are children, so we can see the violence transformed from one generation to the next, but let us understand again that here is a signal, here is a warning, and here is a place that we can intervene to make a difference and to avoid that child becoming the batterer or becoming the violent 17-year old.

Let us do what we can to keep our kids in school. Police officers will tell you that daytime burglaries go up if truancy is not properly controlled, but that is also again another signal that the third grader who is absent three or four days, the police pick him up as he is wandering the streets, they take him back to the school; the school calls home, the mother doesn't come to get him, so the school sends him home on the bus that afternoon. That happens in too many jurisdictions, because we don't have the resources to follow up.

But what would happen if Maryland took the lead in developing a system where a nurse or counselor went with a community police officer, knocked on the door, not to be draconian and take custody necessarily, but to say, "Can we help you?" You may find there a parent who is at her wit's end and about to slip off into crack addiction, and you can pull her back before it is too late if you intervene with people who can look at the family as a whole and make a difference.

Let us do what we can to keep our kids from dropping out. Every delinquency study I have

ever seen shows correlation between delinquency and dropouts. But let's not wait until they are about to drop out. The teachers or the educational personnel represented in this room today can tell you that to wait until the child is in the seventh grade after they have already shown signs of falling behind for two or three years is too late. Let us intervene where it can make a difference.

But even if we keep our children in school, even if we avoid them dropping out, we still have that long time from three o'clock on into the evening, we have those long summer days. And again the Carnegie Foundation points out in telling parents that today with divorce rates high, increases in both parents working, and growth of single parent families, slightly more than half of all American children will spend at least part of their childhood or adolescence living with only one parent. In this situation, exacerbated by the erosion of neighborhood networks and other traditional social support systems, children now spend significantly less time in the company of adults than a few decades ago. More of their time is spent in front of the television set or with their peers and in an age-segregated, unsupervised environment.

Another signal, if you talk to kids as I do who have been in trouble or who are in trouble and ask them what would have made a difference and what could have kept them out of trouble, they will tell you, "Something to do in the afternoon and evenings, something constructive -- and not just sports -- something that can keep me occupied and keep me involved and can make a difference."

It is so much less expensive to pay for that than it is to pay for a juvenile detention facility or an adult jail. And it is a common sense solution to the problem.

How do we do it in a time of limited dollars? We see volunteerism spreading across the country, but you can again link the various forces in the State of Maryland.

Has it ever troubled you to see a school

standing idle at five in the afternoon if somebody is asking for a community center? Well, you have got liability problems I know, but let us use Maryland to figure out how we use the schools and all our public facilities to the best advantage possible. Let's take our parks and recreation specialists who are doing so much to focus on children at risk and link them with the schools and the capital facilities, involve police officers and others who are willing to spend their time and make a difference, to provide alternatives to gangs and positive pursuits for our kids in those hours where crime, if these children are left unsupervised, climbs beginning at three o'clock in the afternoon.

If we can send men to the moon, if we can teach kids how to spell, read, and do arithmetic and use computers, we can do a better job of teaching them how to resolve conflicts without knives and guns and fists. And so many have recognized that and so many have started up on their own trying to find programs that work.

Let us make sure that we exchange information with you about what is working in conflict resolutions and make sure that we come up with solutions that are evaluated, that have been proven successful, and there are such programs.

Our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is working with the Department of Education in this area and we look forward to doing everything we can to work with you.

Let us not in any way evade but only enhance our efforts to focus on kids on drugs and alcohol. As drug use is declining in America, it is again on the upswing with children, children who have not heard the message that drugs hurt, that they kill, that they destroy neighborhoods, that they destroy families. But we cannot give our kids just the negative message of "don't do it." We have got to give our kids a positive feeling about themselves, a positive support, a pat on the back; because the other thing that those kids tell me when I ask them what could have been done to

prevent trouble in the first place is that they tell me "somebody to talk to, somebody who understands how hard it is to grow up in America today, somebody that can give me a hug or a pat on the back when I deserve it, and somebody that can give me a swift talking to when I deserve that. Somebody who is fair but firm." And there are too many kids alone or just with other kids that have nobody to turn to.

I think it is time that all employers start figuring out how we can permit both parents to spend more quality time with their children.

I remember my afternoons and evenings, and my summertimes. My mother worked in the home. She taught us to play baseball, to play fair, appreciate symphonies, to bake a pound cake, and she loved us with all of her heart and she punished us when we deserved it. There is no child care in the world that will be a substitute for what that lady did in our lives.

Now you have both parents working, single parents struggling to work, but you also have computers, high-speed communication, marvelous tools, opportunities for telecommuning. All of us in government are going to have to set an example for how we conform our work places to an ultimate goal of making sure that our parents have quality time with their children.

Educators will tell you one of the biggest difficulties they have is getting parental participation in the school, because the parents can't leave work to participate in school activities as they used to. Let us set an example in Maryland and the Department of Justice for opportunities for parents to participate and be one with their school, their child's school. But there will be too many youngsters who do not have parents who will give them the support that they need, and that indicates again another signal.

Let us make sure that we reach out not just with words, but with action to children who are at risk and without parental support.

In November of 1995, a report by the

Public/Private Ventures provided scientific reliable evidence in mentor programs can positively affect young people. In their evaluation, they found that youth with mentors were 46 percent less likely to initiate drug use, one-third less likely to hit someone, skip half as many days, and improved peer-family relationships over the control group.

With that in mind, the Department of Justice has initiated the Jump Program. We have two such grants under way with the State of Maryland, communities in Maryland, and with Quantico County, and with Project Raise in Baltimore. Let's see how these work. Let's see how we can translate them to other jurisdictions. Let us see how we can build so that no child is without a mentor or a support who can make a difference in their lives.

I had the opportunity to participate as a mentor in Dade County and it is wonderful even after ten years to hear the person who I worked with and to see how she is progressing. Sometimes frustrating, two steps forward and one step back, but you can see the difference it makes and clearly we ought to be able to do this.

Policing is so critically important to our efforts. If you had heard the students at Eleanor Roosevelt High School the other day, as I did, talk about police officers who could talk to young people, police officers who could listen and appreciate and understand kids, you understood just how critically important good police officers are who can reach out and help reweave the fabric of community around our kids.

You are doing some wonderful things in Maryland with community policing, but let us talk beyond the concept of community policing. Why not talk about communities, community criminal justice?

I don't know quite how it works in Maryland, but in so many other jurisdictions, the police officer will do his duty by arresting the kid and getting him to court to testify, then a probation officer will take over. The probation

officer and the community police officer won't talk to each other because they haven't made contact.

A treatment specialist will be dealing with the child 5 miles across town and they won't talk to the community police officer about rules and regulations the kid has to work under.

What happens if Maryland takes the lead in developing the concept of community criminal justice so that the probation officer, the police officers, the local doctor, the public helpers, the volunteer, the mentors, the teachers, all working together as a team, not to put the kid down but to say, "Come on, you can make a difference." You can build it up.

In Montgomery County, the prosecutor's office is talking community prosecution. You hear the term "community corrections." When you bring government back to the people, back to them where they can see what is happening, you can so often be so much more effective.

And that leads us to a court system. How can we develop a court system and a juvenile court system that can make a difference?

First of all, when the police officer arrests a 12-year old and brings him to the court, too often our juvenile courts are overwhelmed, just spread too thin. They don't have enough dollars to focus on the child so nothing happens to that child when he is twelve.

But if we had done an evaluation, an assessment, we would have found that that child's family life had put him terribly at risk, he was going to get into trouble because there was no support, there was drug addiction in the family; the child was headed for further trouble and we could have made a difference if we had made an investment up front. But too often we will wait one time, two times, three times, until the fourth time the child commits a very serious crime, and then it's often too late.

We would like to work with Maryland in making sure that we develop a comprehensive approach for those children seriously at risk, but

we develop a system of graduated sanctions so that that child knows there is going to be punishment and that the punishment is going to fit the crime.

I have had too many police officers across this country tell me, "Ms. Reno, kids just don't think anything is going to happen to them. Because the bad guys get kids to do their dirty stuff, because they don't think anything bad is going to happen to the kids, and the kids don't think so either."

Let's make sure that we develop a system with sanctions that are fair, fit an appropriate juvenile setting, but that are graduated so that the child knows that each time he comes back, he faces a more certain serious punishment. But at the same time, let us make sure that we develop a coherent pattern of treatment. If the child has a drug problem, let's focus on it and oftentimes that will mean expensive supervision.

You have a drug court under way in Baltimore as I understand it, but let us expand it and see how we can create a system that provides appropriate supervision for juveniles.

But no matter what we do, none of the juvenile justice system's efforts are going to work unless we provide after care and follow up. Too often we put all of our money into a juvenile justice system, into a detention facility, into a youthful offender facility, and then we let the child go back to the apartment over the open-air drug market where they got in trouble in the first place. He goes back out, he's going to be right back in the system unless we provide child training placement, unless we provide after care for drug treatment, and unless we provide support mechanism in the community, and that's where community criminal justice comes back.

If you have probation officers with community police officers giving that child a positive start when they return to the community, we are going to have a far better chance of ending this revolving door that we have seen for too long.

But we must recognize one thing, one half

-- only one-half of 1 percent of juveniles in this country were arrested in 1994 for violent crimes. There are not that many juveniles creating that much serious crime. As we approach this problem we must approach it with that in mind, but we have got to recognize that there are some serious youthful offenders who are dangerous and who need to be detained for a sufficient length of time to serve as a sanction and to incapacitate them until we can address their problems through a comprehensive program.

We have got to make sure that we do not let the juvenile justice system be spread too thin. Some of these children cannot be changed overnight or in six months. It is going to take longer and comprehensive programs. If we work together, we can make a difference.

It is so exciting, as I look at what is happening across this country, we do know what works. We do know what it takes to raise a child. We do know that we have a crisis with respect to our children. I would really love to work with Maryland in this coming year to see how we can build together a system that gives our children an opportunity to grow in a strong, healthy, safe, positive manner.

Some people say the problem is too big. I say "No way."

I am reminded of two things that have happened to me in these last four years. In August of 1992, Hurricane Andrew hit our area in Dade county and I walked out into a devastation that I had never seen before. The whole world came to a stop. Communities did not function, some for several days. People were stunned. People had watched their house fall down around them. And then the community started to come together. People started directing the traffic themselves on their own volition. They started delivering water. People came from around the country. I have never seen anything like it as people joined together to deal with the crisis. It took time. It took effort. But that community is stronger and better

for what happened.

And then on the Sunday following April 19th of last year, I went to Oklahoma City to watch the people of that city come together to speak out following that tragedy to help law enforcement, to help victims begin to heal, and I watched the strength and the courage that was absolutely overwhelming.

I then met later, months later, with firefighters in Indianapolis who had gone there to help, and the emergency room technicians who had gone there to help, and I watched an example again of America's tender spirit and its courage.

We have a national problem that demands the best of us, the best of our thoughts, the best of our resources, and all of our strength and courage. But I have never been so sure as I have after three years in office tomorrow that the American people can do it. And I look forward to working with all of you in Maryland to make sure that we give the children of Maryland a future.

Thank you.

[Standing ovation]

MR. TAYLOR: Thank you very much, Attorney General.

What a tremendous way to start the day. I saw so many people frantically taking notes. Just on your message alone, I think we can build the rest of the day.

The Attorney General is available for ten or fifteen minutes worth of questions. I would simply ask when you come up to the mike, you identify yourself and see if we can't generate some good questions.

I can't believe somebody out there doesn't have one.

Here you go.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I will not only appreciate questions, I will appreciate suggestions as to how the Department of Justice can work with you more effectively.