



Department of Justice



ADDRESS BY ATTORNEY GENERAL ROBERT F. KENNEDY
NEW YORK POLICE ATHLETIC LEAGUE DINNER
AMERICANA HOTEL, NEW YORK CITY
FEBRUARY 27, 1963

The Police Athletic League is rounding out a half century of guidance, dedication and service since Captain John Sweeney brought it into being in 1914. The minor delinquencies aimed at then seem innocuous compared with the high crimes and misdemeanors committed by juveniles today. We are impressed by the nature of our problem when almost half of the murderers in Death Row at Sing Sing are under 21 years, and the number of arrests of youths under 18 is increasing steadily.

Your Police Athletic League has earned the appreciation and support of all in New York City. Unfortunately, it has not always received it. In fact, the League should be congratulated for having survived. It went through evolutions from the Junior Police, The Crime Prevention Bureau, the Juvenile Aid Bureau and other names.

The more recent record indicates the League is definitely on the upswing. Thirty-five youth centers, as many play streets, 13 playgrounds and more than a dozen other locations is reassurance that this very worthwhile endeavor is acquiring a degree of permanence and stability. Today, your alumni of honorable and upright citizens are numbered in the hundreds of thousands. The Sugar Ray Robinsons, the Phil Rizzutos, the Eddie Lopats, Louise Meads and Althea Gibsons are the personification of your great success.

I know you would be the first to admit that there is much more that P.A.L. could do and much more for P.A.L. to do. And I know that you will meet this challenge.

Today we are confronted with large increases in delinquency, particularly in major urban areas and correlated with these increases is the high incidence of delinquency among minority groups.

The results, as you well know, are disastrous, with disintegration of many American families through either the inadequacy or the non-existence of parents raising children in their own homes.

At the present time, there are some two and a half million children who, for reasons beyond their control, are living outside their own family homes and these, of course, are the children most susceptible to becoming delinquent or totally maladjusted.

In 1960, the average number of youths aged 16-21 who were out of school and out of work was a disturbing 450,000. But by last year, that number had grown to a whopping 700,000.

They are forming the core of a new lost generation which is growing up in our country with no skills and little hope. Many of its members turn to the short cut of crime to get the things others get by hard work and study.

What is needed now is a systematized and intense effort to mobilize the resources of federal, state and local governments and the private agencies, schools and churches which have done so much pioneer work.

Let me say right here that New York City, under the leadership of Mayor Wagner, is showing the whole country how this can be done. We're very much impressed with the good work of "Mobilization for Youth" program, on the Lower East Side, the planning in Harlem by Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited, Inc., and projects in other neighborhoods throughout the city.

The federal government is glad to have a part in such programs, but it's up to city, state and private agencies to carry most of the load. Mayor Wagner seems to have the knack that's needed to get all these people to work together. And, believe me, I know it isn't always easy.

In 1961, two events occurred which have resulted in greater federal action to deal with delinquency than ever before.

First, the President established a Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime, composed of three Cabinet members, to coordinate and stimulate federal delinquency programs.

Secondly, Congress passed the Juvenile Delinquency Act, which authorized expenditure of \$30 million dollars over a three-year period to test new approaches to delinquency prevention and control.

Both of these federal steps were taken with the complete understanding and realization that juvenile delinquency can and should be combatted, as nearly as possible, at the local level; that the federal government can provide leadership, but that the real hope is that through the home, the church, the schools, and neighborhood, community and state programs, these problems can and will be solved.

Fifteen communities already are planning new, comprehensive youth programs. They include great metropolitan areas like Chicago, Cleveland, and Los Angeles, cities like Minneapolis, New Haven and Charleston, West Virginia and rural areas like Lane County, Oregon.

Important as it is, the federal drive against juvenile delinquency is only one small part of President Kennedy's entire program for youth. He spelled the whole thing out in a special message to Congress on Valentine's day, the first such presidential message ever devoted entirely to youth. The program includes passage of the Youth Employment Act, enlargement of the Peace Corps, establishment of a National Service

Corps or domestic peace corps, extension of the juvenile delinquency program for three more years, more physical fitness programs and aid to education.

Only yesterday, four other members of the Cabinet and I appeared together before the Senate Subcommittee on Employment and Manpower in support of the bill to establish a Youth Conservation Corps and home town youth corps.

The President has given top priority to passage of this bill and we believe it will be enacted. It will provide places for 15,000 youngsters in the Youth Conservation Corps the first year, and 60,000 a year thereafter. Another 50,000 each year can be placed in the Home Town Youth Corps, financed jointly by the federal government and local communities. That will be 110,000 in the second year, a sizeable dent in the estimated 700,000 unemployed school dropouts we are particularly worried about.

Sometime before Easter legislation will be introduced providing for the National Service Corps, which almost everybody seems to call the Domestic Peace Corps. If Congress approves it we'll be ready to get into operation immediately.

There are other plans and projects for youth, too. We expect to spend about \$5 million of the first \$100 million available under the Manpower Retraining Act, on young workers, for example.

In the federal youth correctional institutions for the past 18 months we have been testing ways to ease the transition from prison back to civilian life. Pre-release guidance centers known as "halfway houses" have been established in Brooklyn, Chicago, Los Angeles and Detroit. Three to four months before a boy is to be released he is sent to the halfway house where he is helped to find a job, allowed some privileges, and given careful guidance and counseling so that he can stand on his feet and not return to the same environment, the same situation which probably contributed to his downfall.

It is too soon to evaluate the success of the program, but the results are encouraging. The percentage of boys from the halfway houses who return to prison is far below the rate of 55 percent for federal prisoners who are released directly into the community.

We are going ahead, raising questions, trying to find answers to the problems we're having. I believe we're on the right track.

But all of us can do more -- we in the federal government and you in the Police Athletic League. We must do more and we must work together.

The President said earlier this month in his special message to Congress on youth that each passing month makes it clearer that our

past failures to identify, understand and meet the many problems relating to our Nation's youth cannot be countenanced any longer.

"Awareness is a large part of the battle," the President said, "but it is action that will spell the difference."

I thank you for what you have done in the past and assure you of our cooperation in your future work. Our young people would rather work than loaf or fight; lead meaningful lives instead of being in trouble and behind bars. We must work to see that they have full opportunity to do so. Bob, I wish you well in this new and splendid endeavor.