



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE JANET RENO,  
ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES,

AT THE

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE FIRST ANNUAL COMMEMORATION  
OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

The Great Hall

Department of Justice

9th and Pennsylvania, N.W.

Washington, D.C.

12:07 p.m.

Monday, October 5, 1998

P R O C E E D I N G S

GENERAL RENO: Thank you, Eric. You deserve so much of the credit, too, you and the people that I see in this room that I know.

I want us to think for a moment that we have a special opportunity. 20 years ago when I started a domestic violence unit in our State Attorney's Office in Miami, the police paid no attention to me. The courts would call me during their break and say: Janet, I've got a domestic down here and your prosecutor says you're making her prosecute when the victim doesn't want to prosecute. What are you doing this for?

Times have changed and, as I point out to people, one of the reasons times have changed is more women came to the bench and they helped fashion domestic violence courts and one stop shopping, and all across this country people are taking it more seriously and police agencies are forming specialized units that can make a difference.

But this is the reason we have a special moment. We have violence against women grants available to every state. We can make sure that these grants are being used as wisely as possible by persuading and cajoling and evaluating and showing them what works and what doesn't work. We have the attention of the nation with the American Bar Association and the American Medical Association both focused on this issue. Police agencies are focused and the IACP, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, is focused on the issue.

You and I well know that interests pass on and people lose interest and they stop paying attention to a particular subject. We can't let that happen here until we change America's attitude towards violence. And we can do it.

I think that this is where violence begins. If a child watches his father beat his mother, he comes to accept violence as a way of life. I think up until recently people thought that a domestic was okay; it didn't belong in the criminal justice system. We've proved them wrong in so many courts. We've got to prove them wrong in every court. We've got to prove them wrong in every correctional system.

But we've also got to approach it from the public health perspective and understand that we will not solve the probably just by a punishment or a sanction. There's going to be life after that punishment and sanction, and they have got to be equipped with the medical and health tools necessary to combat their urge to violence, whether it be alcohol treatment, substance abuse treatment.

We can make a difference if we develop systems for providing it in an orderly way and in a carrot and stick fashion.

20 years ago, at the same time I was trying to get people to believe that we should prosecute domestic violence cases, I was also trying to get them to believe that you could really treat drug abuse and alcohol abuse. People shook their heads and they said: Sounds good, doesn't work. I don't know of a person in America now who does not know well either a family member, friend, fellow employee, neighbor, casual acquaintance, who is not the beneficiary of substance abuse treatment.

We can tie that in to domestic violence. We can tie it in and make a difference. We have a chance now, as never before in history, to use the tools of public health, to use the tools of the law, to use the tools of common sense and caring, to literally change America's culture.

I just appreciate what people in this room have done to take us to this point, and let's move on together and make sure that before America passes on to something else, as it is wont to do, we have addressed permanently and with lasting impact the subject of domestic violence in America.

Thank you for all that you do.

(Applause and end of the Attorney General's remarks.)