UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE JANET RENO,

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES,

TO THE

NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP MEETING,

BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE

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Renaissance Hotel
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P R O C E E D I N G S

(10:46 a.m.)

GENERAL RENO: Thank you, Nancy, and thank you and your staff for all that you've done to make this conference possible.

And thank you for that warm welcome. But I'm the one that should be applauding you. Frankly, it's easy to come to Washington and to try to remember what you learned in your community about how to get people to work together and talk about it. It's much harder to work in the community and bring people together and work through problems and get things done. I see people out there who I know have been doing that as partners in their community and as partners

with us for some time. You are the people that make the difference, and I'm just very honored and privileged to be with you today.

We have come so far. We've realized that if we're going to succeed we have to work as partners. We've realized that if we are to succeed we must forget questions of turf and who gets the credit. Learning from what each of us does and where we can agree to share the load gives the whole system a greater chance to be fair, just, and effective.

I think a wonderful example of the partnership that we have talked about is the program that Nancy and BJA introduced back in 1994 called the Comprehensive Communities Program, or CCCP. Last week Tom Windham, the Chief of Police at Fort Worth, and several of his colleagues presented a report called Six Safer Cities, which was published under a BJA grant to the National Crime Prevention Council. This report gets to the heart of what your partnerships can yield.

I have seen that partnership in action. I went to Fort Worth early on after I'd come to Washington and I saw what Chief Windham and a partnership in his community could do. I have seen other examples, and now people don't look at me as if I'm crazy when I talk about prevention and intervention, because you have proved me right, all of you in this room, again and again.

Similar strategies are working in Denver, Hartford, Boston, and New York. In a column written by David Broder in the Washington Post, Broder quotes former Winston-Salem Police Chief George Sweatt, who said: "We can't go on locking people up. We've got to start looking at the front end of the problem. We're fast becoming the number one country for detention. We'd better start looking at kids. If you intervene at the earliest possible moment, you can reduce the number of people who wind up in the criminal justice system."

The day before yesterday I was in Winston-Salem. George Sweatt was not Police Chief; he was the director of the whole state juvenile justice system, and he was following through on what he said. It was working.

I attended a Conference of Mayors meeting last fall and the mayors said, when you first came to talk to us in '93 and '94 we listened; we've put it into effect and it's working. It's working because of you all, who have made such an extraordinary difference in your community and have proven us right, that if we start at the front end we can make a difference.

We have done so much, but there is a tendency in this nation once you succeed just a little bit to become complacent and turn to other problems and focus on

them. We have a golden opportunity in America right now. Crime is down six years in a row. Juvenile crime is down. Let's not turn away and become complacent.

If we can keep after the goals we share, if we can develop prevention, intervention, enforcement, and after-care programs the truly make a difference, we can continue to bring crime down in this nation, and we can have a substantial permanent impact on the culture of violence in this country. I'm convinced that we can do this.

But I would like to talk with you about how we look to the future and the pieces that I think need to be worked on and focused upon. First, I have felt that communities understand their needs and resources better than anyone and that decisions with respect to crime should be made in the community, with the Federal Government supporting you in every way that we can. But I think we have neglected the states and the counties in their relationship to communities and cities, and I would ask each of you to return to your state and figure what can be done with state agencies to leverage greater resources, technical assistance, support, to end fragmentation, and to make sure we use the dollars as wisely as possible in every community.

I look at the dollars that are available from the Federal Government to the states: Violence Against Women moneys, Burn grant moneys, victims' moneys. They're there, and let us make sure that they are used in the wisest way possible, by building strong partnerships between communities and state officials.

I go to a community and there probably is crime. It has spilled over from the city into the unincorporated area. What are you doing about it, I asked. And people kind of looked into space and shuffled their feet and said that they'd better start looking a little bit harder. Let us forge partnerships that don't break at any point along the line.

There are clear, clear -- there's clear proof now that to be successful programs have to be comprehensive. If you develop the best Early Start program for zero to three and then don't have good school systems or good after-school programs, that foundation may come to naught. If you don't have programs after school, the great schooling that the child receives may go for naught.

So how do we improve on the comprehensive nature of the programs we have in our various communities? I think you all again are doing a great job. But I would ask you to focus on the concept of after-care. So much of what we do in enforcement is wasted because we send a child to a detention facility or to a

state training school for nine months and then we return them to the apartment over the open air drug market where they got into trouble in the first place, with no support, little concern, no adult to talk to, and they're going to be right back in our system.

I ask you to expand your thoughts beyond the juveniles to that category of people 18 to 35 who have prior records, who too often are running into closed doors across this nation because people won't hire them, won't give them a chance because of their prior record. They don't know anybody, they don't know where to go. If we can focus on after-care and support of this category of offender, I think we can make a significant difference.

So much has been said about drug treatment in America, its lack thereof or its development. When I first became a prosecutor in 1978, people looked at me as if I were crazy when I said drug treatment works. Now I don't think I can go anywhere in this country where somebody doesn't have a family member, friend, neighbor, fellow employee who has benefitted from drug treatment.

But we've got to make it a coherent continuum. Why do we wait until somebody gets arrested when we see someone who has an obvious drug problem, who's not getting help because they can't afford it? Something is wrong with a nation that says that a man can have five stiff drinks tonight, drive up the Beltway at 90 miles an hour, crash into a car, kill two people, break his two arms, and have the two arms set tonight in a public hospital because he can't afford it, and yet we turn too often to that person pleading for help and say, you've got to be on a waiting list. They get back into trouble.

Let us make sure that we have in our communities across this nation a continuum of prevention programs, of intervention programs before arrest, of drug courts, of programs within prisons, of after-care programs that can truly make a difference.

Let us refine what we've learned about case management, so that we have one person, sensitive and thoughtful, managing that person who is a user, so that they don't get conned because we have had to shift the person from one program to another and he can con his way out of everything because nobody knows what he did in the prior program.

Let us focus on women and children, as we see crime rise amongst women and as we see more people with small children afraid to seek treatment because they're afraid they will lose their children. Let us figure out new and innovative ways to deal with them.

Let us institutionalize some concepts so that it doesn't have to be done based on a grant program or somebody's charity. Let me give you an example. There are so many wonderful conflict resolution, problem-solving programs afoot in this nation today teaching young people how to resolve conflicts without knives and guns and fists.

I have a dream for this nation, and that is that every teacher will receive course work before they graduate from teacher's college or with a degree in teaching in how to teach conflict resolution to their students, how to teach problem-solving to their students, and that every police officer in basic law enforcement training will receive similar training in how to work with young people on the streets to achieve the same goal.

We can do so much if we realize how effective these programs can be. At the same time, we can talk about programs and we can talk about partnership for a long time, but it won't matter one bit unless we look behind the partnerships, behind the programs, to the people involved.

Amongst the people in the community, we have got to build trust. Programs don't do it. It is the people in the programs, people who care and are dedicated, such as yourselves, who can build that trust. We've got to learn to listen to each other and, as my mother would say, listen with a listening ear, and we've got to hear what other people are saying.

We've got to hear through the anger of somebody who has reached the end of their rope the goodness that's there if only we can unlock the door and bring it out. We've got to learn to listen and talk to young people. The day before yesterday I was in Winston-Salem, where a basic law enforcement academy is in the school, a school for kids at risk. Five trainees sat with five students, and one young man said:

I didn't like police; I thought they were the bad guys. I ran the other way when I saw them coming. I was suspicious. Then these guys started talking to me and I turned away and I didn't want to listen to them. But suddenly I started hearing them and what they said made sense.

When you looked at those five trainees and those young people who have been through so much in their young lives, and when you listen to them talk and acknowledge each other, these were not strangers, these were not enemies; these were people what had formed confidence and trust in each other.

We can do so much if we return to our communities and make sure that we look

at the people we are working with and develop that trust -- trust that does not have to come from constant agreement, but trust that comes from respect and regard for each other.

One of the people we must look at as a person here and react to is the victim. We must do that, first of all, because of common humanity. The law has done a good deal about that. The law in state and federal systems now provides a large number of protections for victims. But too often we don't put substance behind the laws, either because the legislature won't fund the system properly or because the person doesn't know how to talk to the victim.

Again, we can do so much if we start thinking about how would I want my mother to be treated if she were sitting across the table from me now? And if we put it in human terms, we can make the system more effective, people will be more willing to testify. There are a number of reasons why we should do it, leaving aside the most important, which is the humane reason.

But there is another reason we must focus on victims. Children who have been the witness or the victims of violence too often come to accept violence as a way of live and perpetuate violence as they grow older by their own conduct and their own actions. We should intervene in any instance in which a child has been the victim of violence, in which the child has witnessed terrible violence, to provide counseling to let them know that violence does not have to be part of their life for the rest of their life.

One area that you'll be surprised to hear me mention, but it is a critical area, for the system will break down without it, is provision for indigent defense. There are too many cases continued because there are not adequate lawyers available. There are too many cases reversed because there was incompetent counsel. And unfortunately, ladies and gentlemen, there are innocent people who have been convicted because they did not have appropriate counsel.

If we are to make Gideon versus Wainwright, the Supreme Court decision guaranteeing counsel to those who could not afford it, a reality, if we are to make the law in this country worth something more than the paper it's written on, we've got to make sure that everyone is properly represented in our courts.

But I have a challenge to defense lawyers. Most of them think that their job is to get the person off, get the motion to dismiss granted, and they think they've won the case. But too often their client walks out, back into violence, back into drug use, and I think it's time to rethink the traditional role of the public defender.

I just received from my old public defender at home, an adversary who I've said I've gotten more provoked at than probably anybody in the criminal justice system, a remarkable statement. it's the Public Defender Anti-Violence Initiative of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit in Dade County, Florida: "It is the primary goal of the Anti-Violence Initiative to reduce the likelihood of our clients engaging in future criminal conduct."

Here are examples of ongoing AVI partnerships and projects in Dade County: "The Public Defender is a partner of the University of Miami Child Service and Policy Research Program in evaluating the effectiveness of the Juvenile Justice Sentencing Project;

"Teamed with the University of Miami School of Medicine Center for Family Studies in a community partnership to prevent violence;

"Worked closely with the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice," -- and on and on, focusing on what they can do to make sure their client never returns to violence.

If we all thought in those terms about what each of us can do, we can all make a difference. This is a golden opportunity. We have a chance in this country to give our children strong and positive futures so that nobody is left by the wayside, so that nobody is written off, so that everyone has equal opportunity.

But we won't do it waiting until they grow up. We've got to start early, with the building blocks of life, with strong and healthy parents, with health care that can make a difference, with solid education, with good schooling, with supervision afternoons and evenings, truancy prevention, conflict resolution skills, school to work opportunities, but most of all giving our kids the spirit and the feeling that they can grow up to make a difference in this life.

You all are shining examples of what one person can do in your community to make a difference. Ladies and gentlemen, because of your work, if we keep at it, we are going to make a difference and we are going to end the culture of violence in this country for the lifetime of the people in this room and I'd say even on to your grandchildren.

God bless you all.

(Applause.)

We have some time for questions and I'd be happy to take your questions, but I

have a question of you. If you didn't want to ask me a question, you might answer this one: If you were the Attorney General of the United States, what would you do to address the concerns that I've talked about today or that are a matter of concern to you and or community?

QUESTION: Ms. Attorney General --

VOICE: Microphone.

GENERAL RENO: This lady is one of the first people I met when I came to Washington. She told me about her program and she's been there ever since.

QUESTION: Ms. Attorney General, it's so good to see you. One of the things that I think that from your position would be very helpful on local communities is, as we look at the corrections system people think it's the corrections system that has to fix itself. I would ask you and other Cabinet members to really convene a session of agencies at the local level, such as United Ways, such as school districts, such as our local community resources, because together as we begin to look at the full spectrum of care, if we literally sit at the local level and connect the dots and find our resources locally, what's happening in corrections is all of our problem, but it has always only been relegated to just the criminal justice system to take care of itself.

I think we can work very, very well with our work force development commissions, our United Ways, to be able to look at peer-run group recovery homes, our local funding entities that actually fund treatment where we can fund it properly and do some things. It would be very, very good if you could convene a meeting of some of those lead agencies and people to be able to get them involved in this whole situation.

GENERAL RENO: Could you do me a favor and make sure I have your card?

QUESTION: Yes, ma'am.

GENERAL RENO: So I can follow up with you and get more of the details.

QUESTION: I will. Thank you.

GENERAL RENO: That's a wonderful idea.

(Applause.)

MR. SMALLWOOD: Honorable AG, this is Roland Smallwood, Columbia, South Carolina.

In response to your question, I think the group assembled in this hall today happens to be the members of the church and choir, so the problem does not lie within the members that are assembled here. The problem lies with those persons in law enforcement, particularly those that are chiefs of police and sheriffs, that have not embraced the concept of community policing and community mobilization that you so diligently try to push through.

I think with the upcoming National Crime Prevention Council's conference in November that some effort needs to be made to make sure that persons in the upper echelon levels of law enforcement that have not embraced the concept of police, of community policing, be brought into this conference so that they can see communities that have accepted it and it is working.

In rural America you've got a lot of sheriffs and police officers that still do not believe, still want the nightsticks and believe that they can get people to submit by beating them across the head with a stick. I think unless those persons are brought to the forefront, part of America is going to move forward and part of America is going to stay in the back because of their beliefs.

GENERAL RENO: I think your point is well taken, and you will be interested to know that I'm going from here to a conference on just that subject. I think the great issue that we have now is how we recognize that there are many, many police officers who are dedicated, doing an extraordinary job for their community. The great majority of police chiefs and sheriffs support community policing, support sensitive and professional policing, but there are some police officers, like there are some lawyers and some doctors, who abuse the confidence and the trust that we place in them.

I think those few have created a sense of concern amongst a significant part of the population. It is imperative that all of us, police and the community, work together to address this issue, in efforts such as I saw in Winston-Salem, where I had seen trust developed that was just extraordinary, or in High Point, North Carolina, where the faith community had been involved and the complaints against police officers had fallen dramatically because people had learned how to talk to each other. We are pursuing efforts within the Civil Rights Division.

But I think your point is very well taken, and I would continue to appreciate specific suggestions you have, such as you made with respect to the fall conference on what we can do.

QUESTION: Attorney General Janet Reno, I am deeply in admiration for all the work that you've done, and I have a request to make. I run halfway houses for offenders coming out of prison. I am seeing a trend coming out of Washington -- I'm in the State of Nevada. I'm seeing a trend come out of Washington that says we need to become bean-counters when it comes to substance abuse treatment, how many people attended a process group, how many people received one on one counseling.

This is all in the substance abuse treatment field and this is just one aspect of the work that we do. This level of bean-counting to me doesn't really address the problem of what are we actually producing. I would like to see a stronger emphasis coming out of the work we're doing as to what we are actually producing. In other words, how many people are not going back to prison, how many people are not using three months and six months later, and get away from this fee for service bean-counting, towards a more results-oriented objective throughout the whole field, get away from that managed care model and move more towards a results-oriented field for all of the social service agencies throughout the United States.

It's problem my Scotch nature, but this is what I want to see for my tax money, and I would appreciate your backing in this. Thank you.

GENERAL RENO: I need to know who's requiring you to do that bean-counting.

(Laughter.)

QUESTION: There goes my funding, Attorney General.

GENERAL RENO: Here's what I would appreciate your doing.

QUESTION: Okay.

GENERAL RENO: Do you have a card?

QUESTION: Yes.

GENERAL RENO: If you can figure out who's asking you to do it, then I'll call you or have somebody call you in about a week and let's work through it and understand it.

You will not achieve, however, the results until we develop a better case

management generally across the country, and I referred to that earlier, so that we know what the results are. And if we can develop information as to results, it can make a tremendous difference in terms of persuading Congress and the legislatures to fund programs that produce results.

We've got so much to do in showing results, whether it be in drug treatment or other efforts, and sometimes you can't show results overnight. You've got to invest in children before you have the proof of the pudding. But I think we can do a lot more, and I'm proud of what Nancy and others have done in terms of developing an ability to evaluate results, not the beans.

QUESTION: I see that coming out of the Bureau of Justice. It's other agencies that I'm having problems with.

GENERAL RENO: Let me find out who.

(Laughter.)

GENERAL RENO: So make sure I get a card.

QUESTION: Okay, you've got it. Thank you.

QUESTION: Good morning, Attorney General. I thought I'd better chime in here because we're getting left out in the back of the room.

GENERAL RENO: Let me just -- please excuse me just for a moment. I can take you and two other people in the time that I've got, and I apologize. So I didn't want people to stand and think that I could get to everybody. So forgive me, but we'll take you and two others.

MR. GATULA: My name is Rod Gatula. I am a family physician and, looking over the list of participants, I suspect I'm the only physician here and certainly probably the only individual from a medical school.

One of my concerns and one of the things I've been working on for about four years is to get the issues that you're discussing regarding domestic violence, drug abuse, et cetera, into the health education field. When you ask about what sort of things can be done to have an impact, I think as I look at health education and have looked at it there is almost no curriculum in the medical schools, nursing schools, on how to identify and how to treat individuals who are involved in domestic violence, drug abuse, et cetera.

If you want to look at a longitudinal impact, if you train health care professionals before they get out of those institutions to look for issues around domestic violence, to look to ask families about whether members have been incarcerated, to look at drug abuse issues, they're one of the constants in the life of a child, besides the school system, where you know that that child will be seeing a health care professional for all those years, and that they may also be able to change the system.

So I would encourage the Bureau of Justice to get more involved in pushing health care institutions in teaching those type of curriculum, so that practitioners who come out know how to deal with them.

GENERAL RENO: Doctor, you've just become a great force for me.

But first of all, I can't see you that well from this distance, but you sound like Garrison Keilor.

(Laughter.)

GENERAL RENO: First of all, when I first had some public hearings in Florida on substance abuse, I discovered that then, in about 1987, there was no curriculum on addictionology in any major medical school. I hope that's changing, and Donna Shalala and I have both written to deans of medical schools urging the change. Now I've got to go back, prodded by you, to see what's being done.

I was very pleased to see that the American Pediatric Association -- I'm not sure what it's name is -- had developed some protocols and some guidelines for pediatricians, because I think pediatricians can be powerful forces for talking to children about violence, violence prevention, how to treat it, what to do, and that the combination of the public health discipline and the criminal justice law enforcement discipline can be very powerful.

I then asked, well, if the pediatricians are doing this, what are the family physicians doing about domestic violence? Someone recently had a conversation with a representative of the American Medical Association and I'm told some good progress is being made.

I'm going to go back and look at it all and see if I can't translate more effort into health education. I think your point is extremely well taken, and I'd appreciate any other suggestions you have, too.

GENERAL RENO: Yes, sir.

MR. SMITH: Ms. Reno, my name is Michael Smith. I'm a member of the National Youth Network. First I'd like to just thank you for your support to young people across this nation. You have truly been a great leader in making sure that young people are constantly at the table and that we're being heard in all sorts of areas.

GENERAL RENO: Michael, you wouldn't let me do otherwise.

(Laughter.)

MR. SMITH: Thank you.

I just wanted to say to you, if I were Attorney General for a day, one of the things, one of the things that I would like to see, is any time a decision is going to be made that affects the life of young people, whether it's a sheriff making a decision for a curfew or whether it's a district attorney deciding to represent a different type of opinion, I think there should be a committee of young people, of diverse young people, not just the straight A students, but the young people who have been through those experiences, who could be there to advise that person on that decision.

GENERAL RENO: I think that's an excellent point.

(Applause.)

GENERAL RENO: I will tell you, Michael, that if you -- with the caseload a district attorney has or many public officials have, if you left it to advice by committee, we'd never get anything done that you and I wanted to get done.

What a good person will do in the community if they are sensitive to your recommendation is make sure that they listen to young people wherever they go and that they float an idea, that they try out something new, that they say, what do you think about this. I try, as I think you know, as I've said before, whenever I go to a new community to talk to young people who are in trouble or who have been in trouble, to ask them what they think. I try to involve as many young people as possible in my thought processes.

So it may not be by committee all the time, but it's clear that young people have so much to say. When I go to schools, I explain to them that they ask better questions than anybody, including newspaper reporters. You can learn volumes from them.

MR. SMITH: Thank you.

QUESTION: (Speaks in Native American tongue). I greeted you, Attorney General Janet Reno, in my language, acknowledging you also as a relative and thanking you for the work that you've done so far.

My name is Wanetta Lonewolf. I'm a member of the Oglalala Lakota Nation from Pine Ridge, South Dakota. I live in Phoenix, Arizona. I have an organization called Dream Weavers, which consists of ex-Native gang members. One of my concerns is the funding that is starting to become more and more available to remote areas and tribal nations is really geared towards federal juvenile institutions.

I would just like to encourage you in your position to work with more the judges across the United States to look more at alternative forms of incarceration and also looking at other forms of creative sentencing, as opposed to putting our youth in the warehousing system, because that makes our job a lot more difficult when they come out.

Also, to take into consideration those youth who are locked up. Taking a look at the curriculum -- I do believe that institutions can rehabilitate. We look at them as not being able to. The issues that you are concerned with in terms of the drugs, the alcohol, the violence, that does also exist within the juvenile prisons, and we have a lot of crimes that are being committed inside the prisons. So if you would take a look at some of the programs that are being instituted, the curriculum that has been developed for youth while they are locked up, I think that would make those of us who really have a passion in working with our youth, our jobs a lot easier.

GENERAL RENO: I've assigned somebody to do that and to work on both curriculum alternatives, sentencing circles, learning from Native Americans as to what can be more effective in giving young people a chance for a strong and positive future, and I would appreciate any specific suggestions that you can provide me.

Thank you all so very, very much.

(Applause)