



SAFE FROM THE START:

NATIONAL SUMMIT ON CHILDREN EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE

Washington Court Hotel  
Atrium ballroom  
Thursday, June 24, 1999  
11:30 A.M. - 1:00 P.M.

VIP PANEL DISCUSSION AND COURT-TV TAPING

PANEL:

Moderator:

Eric H. Holder, Jr., Deputy Attorney General

Janet Reno, Attorney General

William E. Kennard, Chairman, Federal Communications  
Commission

Ann Rosewater, Counselor to the Secretary

United States Department of Health and Human Services

Final Announcement: Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-MA)

E X C E R P T     O F     P R O C E E D I N G S

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MR. HOLDER: -- effect of violence through the eyes of children. What's really sad about that video, in addition to the stories that we heard, is the fact that those stories are not very uncommon.

The statistics show that children are much more vulnerable to crime than adults. Let me just share some statistics

with you.

Children make up about 33 percent of crime victims. In 1997, child protective service agencies investigated about three million reports of child abuse, of our nation's children age 12 to 17, 1.8 million have been the victim of serious sexual assault, 3.9 million have been the victim of a serious physical assault, and 9 million have witnessed some kind of serious violence. Twenty-four percent of all rapes occur in the victims' home where children are likely to be present to hear or to see the assault on their mothers or caretakers.

Now, the psychological, developmental and societal effects of this exposure have to be just staggering.

Attorney General Reno, what do you think these statistics tell us?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: They tell us that we have got to start very young protecting our children from abuse and neglect, protecting them from violent scenes in every way that we can, and then responding immediately to those who suffer violence, who experience it, who witness it.

The child who watches his father beat his mother comes to accept violence as a way of life. These children have told the story so pointedly. The child who is abused and neglected is going to be at greater risk for depression, for drug and alcohol abuse, for violence in their lives.

The statistics are staggering. They show that a child who is abused or neglected faces a 53 percent greater likelihood of being arrested as a juvenile and a 38 percent likelihood for being arrested as an adult for a violent crime.

Children in these situations become our adult offenders. We can stop it before it starts, or we can get to it quickly and provide the counseling and make the difference in these children's lives early on.

MR. HOLDER: Now, you mentioned counseling. Ann, what were some of the other things you think we can do to stop that cycle, other kinds of things we can do to stop the kinds of statistics that we've just heard?

MS. ROSEWATER: I think one of the things that we've learned is that children, probably of any age, need a caring adult, somebody who's crazy about them. And children who experience abuse or who witness their parents abusing each other often don't have the sense that that bond is secure.

So I think one of the things that we need to do is help parents as well as children make sure that they have a nurturing and continuous caregiver.

MR. HOLDER: What about the notion of multidisciplinary teams. That's something we've heard discussed a lot over the last three days. What does that mean to you and what's the effect of those kinds of teams?

MS. ROSEWATER: Well, I think we've actually learned a lot just over the past three days with several innovative programs that we've learned about and that we will actually hear a little bit more about in the program as we go forward, but professionals from different disciplines, whether it's mental health or police, whether it's domestic violence service providers or child protection workers, are bringing a different ear and a different set of skills to their work with children and families.

And what I think we've learned is that we need all of those eyes and ears in order to make sure that children are actually protected, that their parents are protected, that perpetrators of such abuse are held accountable, and also that services and support are provided whenever necessary to all of the members of the family.

MR. HOLDER: Attorney General Reno, before you became Attorney General you were a state prosecutor, and you've had a lot of experience dealing with police officers and prosecutors, some of whom, in my experience, I would characterize as hardened, maybe a little cynical.

Is it realistic to expect that those kinds of people will be able to interact with people from social service agencies to form these kinds of multidisciplinary teams?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: A good and caring police officer can be the glue that brings a multidisciplinary team together and they can make such an incredible difference.

The prosecutor who is sensitive to all the issues can be so important, and there are so many who want to make it work.

I think there is another person in this equation, too, and that is the Judge. I think this nation has got to come together and say that for courts that deal with abuse and neglect, we are going to make sure the judge has the resources he needs to do the job, to conduct a proper investigation, to make proper recommendations and informed recommendations as to what needs to be done in the disposition of the case.

If we can return the child safely and in good condition to the parents, let's do so and let's have follow up to make sure that it's done right.

If we have got to terminate parental rights after a proper investigation and proper time, let's do it that way, but do it right, not with drift, not with letting a child bounce from one foster home to another, but to a world that makes a difference.

We did something in Miami with drug courts. We started with one in 1989 on the same theory that, give the resources and the judges who care and who are informed can do it. Let's develop model children's courts that have the resources to do the job.

MR. HOLDER: It's clear that the only way to prevent and reduce children's exposure to violence is to keep them safe from the start.

Violence prevention can take many forms, but the key to every effective prevention effort is to start early and to

start smart. As we have all learned, if we don't invest in our expectant mothers, if we don't invest in early childhood care, if we don't teach mothers and fathers how to parent, if we don't change community norms that sanction violence, then we are left with flawed, expensive programs that provide mothers and children with too little too late.

Let's take a look at one successful nurse home visitation prevention program in Oakland, California, that starts early and that starts smart.

(A video is played.)

MR. HOLDER: Well, it is very clear that effective prevention starts early and prevention efforts can take a whole variety of forms. They range from home visitation programs focusing on expectant mothers in the early years of a child's life to programs in high schools focusing on nonviolent conflict resolution skills among teenagers.

HHS is doing a variety of things, a variety of extraordinary things with regard to prevention programs. Ann, what have we learned about the best prevention programs?

MS. ROSEWATER: Well, I think that we've

-- we've just seen that home visiting is one quite valuable approach to preventing children's exposure to violence. Well designed with well-trained home visitors, it can bring messages and services to fragile families in a familiar place and it can help parents learn the special skills of parenting.

Home visiting is an important component of any successful prevention program, but the fact is it's only component. In our experience, there are other key elements which include both preschool programs and quality early childhood programs, Head Start and child care.

Let me speak to both of these for a minute. While I think actually most Americans understand the profound impact that

Head Start has had on preparing children for success in school, we probably know less about but are aware that it prevents violence in the home as well, and can help prevent it.

For a variety of reasons, we can see that primary prevention means early and healthy child development just as Eric has said. Our Early Head Start program gives infants and toddlers the nurturing relationships they need. It takes the opportunity, through comprehensive services, through health, through mental health counseling, through linkages with other community resources, to teach mothers and fathers how to parent their children.

Second, Early Head Start, which serves families with children who are zero to three, those critical years, and Head Start, which serves preschoolers, provides settings for troubled children where troubled children are able to learn and able to trust and able to feel secure.

But beyond that on a very practical level, Head Start provides an environment where we might be able to first learn that there's violence going on in the home.

It provides a chance for caregivers in Head Start to tip off law enforcement, to tip off social services, and to get the protection and the intervention that's so necessary for both the parents and the child.

Quality child care programs can play a similar role. Of course, child care enables a parent to get into the work force and to get productive employment.

Earning more can reduce some of the financial pressures that actually can trigger violence in the home, that can trigger battering against a child or between parents.

Second, child care providers can again help mothers and fathers learn better ways to care for their children and to give children safe space to learn. This includes showing that violence has no place in parenting.

Finally, Head Start providers and child care providers alike can often be the early warning system to children who need help because there is violence in the home.

I think that's why the Administration is pushing the prevention agenda so hard. We want to meet the President's goal of a million children in Head Start by the year 2002, and we drastically want to expand the availability of child care for working families.

MR. HOLDER: Attorney General Reno, Ann has talked a lot about parenting programs. I mean, do you think it's the role of government to develop these kinds of programs? Can government teach people how to be better parents?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Government can do so much in terms of giving people helpful hints of how to be better parents, of telling them what they might do when that child is running a fever of 103 degrees and the parent doesn't know what to do. She's frustrated. She's been up all night for two nights in a row. How does she respond? What does she do?

A nurse explaining in gentle and understanding terms what to expect can make such a difference. A doctor telling that parent that she doesn't have to put up with domestic violence can make such a difference.

If we developed a protocol and every family physician's office so that people could know that you don't tolerate that sort of stuff, I think government can in a very thoughtful way provide the tools that give a parent a far better ability to care and cope with raising children. It is the single most difficult thing I know to do, and we need all the help we can get.

MR. HOLDER: Well, as the recent events in Littleton, Colorado, have served to remind us, the tragedy of youth gun violence can strike any community any day.

Prevention efforts must include strategies to keep guns out of criminals' hands and also out of the hands of our young people. The devastating effects of gun violence hit

families and communities in ways that are unexpected and often unimaginable.

Let's take a look at a public service announcement that brings this reality to light and asks the question, "Where have all the children gone?"

(A public service announcement is played.)

MR. HOLDER: The most current data actually shows that 13 children under the age of 20 every day die by gun violence. Attorney General Reno, what can we do to stem this plague of gun violence that plagues our children?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: First of all, I think we look at the whole community, and we tell people that there is going to be swift, firm consequences for anybody who illegally uses a weapon. And your leadership has been so important in that initiative around this country.

Secondly, I think we have got to start teaching our children, who are sometimes the perpetrators as well as the victims, that there are ways to resolve conflicts without knives and guns and fists.

And teachers across this country are learning to teach their children how to resolve conflicts, how to solve problems, how to communicate with each other.

I have a dream that every teacher in the United States should have course work in how to teach children to resolve conflicts.

(Applause.)

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: And community police officers can learn the same thing in the basic law enforcement academy and the parks and recreation specialist who cares can do so much. We make a difference in that regard.

I think we've got to focus on alcohol, which is oftentimes the generator of the violence amongst youth. We have given



so much attention to illegal drugs, but we have got to understand that figures from the CDC indicate that alcohol is oftentimes the fuel of violence.

But one things we've got to come to grips with in this country: We do not have to be such a violent nation. We have seen crime go down six years in a row. We have seen children begin to understand that there will be consequences.

But let's take two cities, Chicago and Toronto, of equal size. 1992 to 1996, one hundred gun homicides in Toronto; 3,063 in Chicago. It doesn't have to be.

And America should rise up and say let's make sure that criminals don't get guns whether it be at a licensed firearms dealer's or at a gun show or a flea market or anywhere if they aren't legally entitled to have them.

And let's make sure that we provide appropriate safety mechanisms to prevent children from using them and hurting them, but let us make sense of the gun issue. It is not a political issues, should not be. It should be a matter of common sense that we don't let people get guns unless they know how to safely and lawfully use them and have evidenced the ability to do so.

(Applause.)

MR. HOLDER: Keeping in that same regard, how do you think we in the federal government can involve communities in this fight? What does the Administration have -- does the Justice Department have to get communities involved in this fight against gun violence?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: The President has directed us, and the Secretary of Treasury and the Treasury Department, to develop gun initiatives throughout the country that focus on how we make sure that everyone who illegally possesses, sells, distributes, uses a gun is appropriately prosecuted and receives the appropriate penalty, to do that in partnership with state and local law enforcement so that we

don't duplicate resources; that we trace guns to those that are distributing them into the community and getting them into the hands of children and people who don't know how to use them and haven't evidenced an ability to safely use them; but to come together in a comprehensive way, to take out that drug gang that is distributing them and letting them proliferate in the community; but then to have something that goes in the place of the drug gang.

Too often we take out an organization, but we don't put something in such as Weed-and-Seed organization or other community program that can address the needs of zero to three and prevention programs that make a difference, that can provide alternatives for children, that can teach them conflict resolution, that can reweave the fabric of community around children and their families who are at risk.

MR. HOLDER: Let's shift gears a little bit and talk about efforts to prevent children's exposure to violence from the media. Let's turn to the next video and learn more about what children are seeing on TV and we will hear in their own words how media violence affects them.

(A video is played.)

MR. HOLDER: Well, clearly children are affected by what they see on TV. Some even say that children are more affected by what they see on television than what they learn in school.

Bill, Chairman Kennard, violence in the media, some say, is too prevalent. Preventing children's exposure to violence must include reducing children's exposure to violent images. What are we doing to give parents the tools to keep violent images out of their homes?

CHAIRMAN KENNARD: Well, you are absolutely right, Eric. Television is such a powerful influence on our kids. And our kids are just bombarded with these violent images every day.

I read recently that when a kid in America reaches the age of 18, that kid has seen 40,000 dramatized murders and 200,000 assaults just sitting at home watching television.

And we know from seeing study after study that these images do affect kids, and that they do affect the behavior of our young people. The question is, What do we do about it?

Well, we know that it's very tough for parents today. We are living in a high-tech age. There's a lot more content out there, content streaming into our homes over television, cable television, satellites.

It's time that we give parents the kind of high-tech tools that are available to protect their kids from these images at home.

How do we do that? Well, we have the V-chip now. Thanks to the work by the Clinton-Gore Administration and enlightened members of Congress like Ed Markey from Massachusetts by July 1 of this year half of the television sets in America will have the V-chip.

By the beginning of next year, a hundred percent of new television sets will have the V-chip.

The V-chip is a little silicon chip that's imbedded in the television, doesn't cost anything. It's less than a dollar. It won't cause your set to cost any more, but what it does, it allows parents to program their television sets so they can block out the harmful programming that they don't want their kids to see, some of these violent images, sexually explicit images, coarse language.

But what we have to do as a country is make parents aware of the V-chip. It's a wonderful tool, but too many parents don't know about it. We know that 77 percent of parents would use the V-chip if they knew about it.

So we are engaged in a huge campaign at the FCC, working with the media, to get the word out about the V-chip. My colleague, Gloria Tristani, who was here is leading a V-

chip task force. We are working with the newspapers in the country. I am pleased to announce that 11 major newspapers have sent me a letter just yesterday indicating that they will put the TV ratings in their newspapers, and that works in conjunction with the V-chip so that parents will know how important the V-chip is.

We can do this if we get the word out. We did it with drunk driving in this country. We did it with seat belts. We did it with all sorts of things.

When we have the will to work with the media to get the word out about these technology tools, we can make a big difference.

MR. HOLDER: Well, in addition to the V-chip, are there other technologies that can be of assistance to parents in trying to screen what their children see?

CHAIRMAN KENNARD: Well, absolutely. I mean, one of the wonderful things about technology today is that it's giving parents all sorts of new tools. The Internet, for example, a lot of parents fear the Internet, but we have to give parents the tools to screen out some of the harmful content that comes over the Internet.

At the FCC, we are engaged in a campaign to teach parents how they can get Internet screening software so that they can screen out some of the harmful imagines that come out over the Internet.

The other wonderful thing about the Internet today, though, is that it's such a great tool to change kids' lives in a positive way. A lot of kids are finding that they can get anonymously mental health care information over the Internet when in the past they weren't able to get this information before.

So we need to embrace technology and all the wonderful, positive things it can do to solve some of the problems we're talking about today.

MR. HOLDER: Well, as we have been discussing, the first place to discuss children's exposure to violence is in the home and all too often witnessing violence can lead to trauma, depression, poor school performance and acting out violent behavior.

We must recognize that often mothers of children who are abused are also victims of violence themselves. Let's take a look at a program that takes on the difficult issue of the link between domestic violence and child abuse and strives to intervene effectively and offer help to both mother and to child.

(A video is played.)

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(A video is being played.)

MR. HOLDER: It's critical to focus both on the parent and the child when a family is experiencing violence. Ann, why do you think that traditionally we have not done that, that we have focused on one or the other, that we have treated these problems as if they were separate?

MS. ROSEWATER: You know, I think historically communities have, as you said, approached domestic violence and child abuse, particularly, as if they were sort of two trains running down a parallel track. But domestic violence service providers and child welfare and child protection systems have come to be through different philosophies, different constituencies, different legal frameworks and indeed a different focus, or a focus on a different part of the family as their primary concern.

Child abuse specialists and domestic violence specialists are sort of heading in the same direction, and sometimes they can see each other. I mean in Miami we can see that they've actually come together, and in Boston we can see that they've come together.

But this is still much too rare. I think actually it's

heartbreaking that that's true. Because it makes no sense. I mean two decades of research now confirm that child abuse and domestic violence occur in the same families. Not always, but in a high percentage of cases. And we need to pay attention to that.

We also know that in too many instances social services, child protection, lack the resources, judges lack information, battered women who are victims and children who may witness the violence or be abused themselves, they lack advocates and they don't get the help they need.

Finally, we know that batterers are often not held accountable. Even sometimes when there are batterers intervention programs, we're not monitoring whether or not there is such compliance with those programs, and that's essential.

Tragically, I think we also find that sometimes victims, particularly battered women who are victims themselves, are the ones who are sometimes blamed.

Our prevention and treatment strategies as you just heard are just on the cusp of catching up with this research. And as I said, I think we can get beyond viewing treating, both preventing and treating child abuse and domestic violence, as separate problems with separate solutions.

Children, as we've heard and I think can't be repeated too often, cannot be safe unless their mothers are safe.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: We can't let either child victims or parents who are victims suffer in silence. I think that's why we need a seamless system of care for victims of domestic violence and victims of child abuse. All of the major community institutions, whether it's child welfare or child protection, schools, faith organizations, the health and mental health care systems, law enforcement, the courts, both juvenile and adult, criminal and civil, must work together, must coordinate services, must exchange information while maintaining the appropriate confidentiality to protect victims and keep them safe.

Joint training for child abuse specialists and domestic violence specialists together can also be a critical tool in building that seamless system. Community agencies that provide child protection services should screen every member of the family privately and confidentially for information about domestic violence. Domestic violence agencies should be asking the same kinds of questions about child abuse.

Pediatricians should be finding out both about the children and the parents of those children in their practice if there are any signs of abuse from either one.

Again, our history has been to treat each of these problems like the other one doesn't exist. Our challenge is to make one train from two, and really from many, so that every member of a family is free from abuse, free from fear, and safe all the time.

(Applause.)

MR. HOLDER: Attorney General Reno, was that your experience in Miami and in Dade County, that the problems were treated separately; if so, what did you do to try to change that, what can we do as a nation to try to change that?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, when I started out 21 years ago there was no attention paid to domestic violence. It was said to be a private matter, and it took a long time to change things. I think the women going to the bench had a distinct influence on the issue.

(Applause.)

and Judge Letterman --

MR. HOLDER: And into prosecutor's offices.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: But I think it takes everyone coming together, and one of the things that is important, the police officer is going to be the first person on the

scene. All too often the referrals that are made because of case load and the like, the person is not seen for some time, the child is not seen for some time, the family is not seen for some time in too many places in this country.

A sensitive police officer at that scene, or support personnel with that police officer can make a tremendous difference both for the victim and the child who observes the violence, and we have just got to do everything we can to understand that mental health professionals, experts in drug and alcohol abuse, there are so many people that can have a role in reshaping the lives of these people who want so to return to safety.

MR. HOLDER: Bill, you're not in law enforcement, but I mean what's your perspective on this on hearing what the Attorney General has said, what Ann has said, having seen the video; what are your thoughts?

CHAIRMAN KENNARD: Well, I think that we need to approach this from a multidisciplinary approach. We need to use the power of all the tools we have in society, and I fundamentally believe that when we have the political will to solve these problems we can get the word out, and we have such a powerful media in this country that when we decide that we're going to attack a problem and get the word out, tell kids and parents and battered spouses how they can find help, where they can find help, we can make a tremendous difference.

And I'm certainly committed at the Federal Communications Commission who work with the media every day to make sure that they are doing their part to make sure that we can get the word out to make a safer place for the next generation of Americans.

MR. HOLDER: Well, unfortunately despite our best efforts, we know that many children will become victims of and witness to violence. Our focus then must shift from prevention to intervention.

We're all learning that the best intervention programs are



multidisciplinary efforts, as Bill just mentioned. Those that link law enforcement with social services and mental health providers are among the most successful.

The child development community policing, the CDCP project in New Haven, is one of the more successful prevention programs that pairs trained psychiatrists with police officers to respond immediately when children are victims and witnesses to crime.

Let's watch the CDCP program in action.

(A video is played.)

MR. HOLDER: It seems that too often different professionals from different fields hold different pieces of the puzzle in their hands. Law enforcement officers have one perspective, mental health professionals have another perspective.

Programs like CDCP stress that early multidisciplinary intervention focus intensely on the psychological development of children. Clearly mental health providers have always focused on psychological development.

Attorney General Reno, why should those of us in law enforcement be concerned about the mental health of children in this regard?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Because you're going to see them back again. If you don't care just on the grounds of common humanity and compassion, then you should care about the future of this country in terms of safety and crime.

I like to care about it just from common humanity and compassion, because if you get to that child early on, the moment it's happening, you can make such a difference. If you have the best-trained mental health professional, that would be ideal. If you have a police officer who has been given instruction by a mental health professional, that can make such a difference.

But the one thing I think it is important for all of us to understand is, that mental illness can be treated, it can be prevented. Mental health treatment is working in this country. We have come light years in 25 years, and we have got to let legislatures, county commissions and everyone know that this is a tremendous investment in prevention for the future and in restoring children to wholeness.

I think it is very important that at the first meetings the police officer and the prosecutor, the child protection specialist, the mental health worker, the person perhaps who has information concerning the alcohol history of the perpetrator, all of these people come together and try to figure out what is in the best interest of the child in that situation.

Is it better to prosecute; is it better to handle it through a dependency route; do you have sufficient evidence; what's the best way to proceed? Bringing people together to decide. What can be done immediately to protect that child?

We can do so much if we reach out to all the disciplines involved and really focus on coming together, and as I've said before, pulling the fabric of community back around the children who have suffered so much.

(Applause.)

MR. HOLDER: How would you define that fabric of community as you've termed it; we've seen police officers working with mental health professionals. Who else would you include in that fabric?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Oh, you've got me started. I'd have people with parenting skills working with others in terms of reaching out to prospective parents to let them know what to expect. I would have good, solid Educare for our children, educare in those first three or four years before Headstart may kick in, before it's expanded.

People who know that those first three years are the most

formative of a child's life, that that's when the child learns the concept of reward and punishment and develops a conscience, and 50 percent of all learned responses are learned in those first years.

I would have the best medical care for children in those early years, preventative medical care that can make such a difference. I would focus on our teachers in America and tell this nation we're paying too much attention to football players who make in the six digit figures and not enough on our teachers.

(Applause.)

I would have counselors available in our schools and in our communities, and mental health specialists for difficult situations so that there could be referrals. I would make sure that there was a case manager that prevented that child from falling between the cracks, and that there were people who were specialists in bringing everybody together both from the parent side and the child side to better understand.

We can do so much if we make an investment in our children. They are such tough young critters, and if given half a fighting chance they can really have strong and positive futures.

You got me started.

(Applause.)

MR. HOLDER: I actually think the Attorney General is a bit of a self-starter. Bill, you've heard the Attorney General talk about weaving this fabric, she talked about resources and expenses. Now, this is something that's not going to be cheap.

How do you answer the critics who will say, you know, you're going to have the federal government, local government, state government spending huge amounts of money in these endeavors. Is it worth it?

CHAIRMAN KENNARD: Oh, it's absolutely worth it, because I am sort of the technology person here today, and I keep coming back to the power of technology.

It is so fundamentally changing our economy for the better, we've got to apply some of these technology tools to make our schools safer and our communities and our families stronger.

For example, we have invested as a nation about two billion dollars last year to put computers into our schools and libraries and rural health care facilities in the country. And we targeted that investment into the poorest and most isolated of our schools.

Well, these schools then become community access centers for technology, so that people who want to learn about some of the wonderful programs we heard about today have a place to go.

I've seen this in action. I've visited some little storefront offices in intercity areas around the country where battered women and kids that don't have a place to go after school can go and learn about technology, learn how to get jobs, learn about mental health care.

It's an investment that we just cannot afford not to make for our country.

MR. HOLDER: And we've talked about how effective the multidisciplinary approach is. Let me ask you a question I asked the Attorney General before.

What about people in the social services who might have a reluctance, perhaps a distrust of people in law enforcement; how do we convince them that they need to cross the line and work with those of us in law enforcement to effectively treat children?

MS. ROSEWATER: I think we've begun to see various processes. Again, we've all seen now some examples through

these videos. Efforts, some led by the courts, some led by child protective services, some led by mental health, some led by police, some led by domestic violence service providers, to take the first step; to provide that leadership, to reach out and invite others to talk about the families they're working with, to recognize that in fact they are working with the same families.

Sometimes they are giving contrary or contradictory responses that cannot be helpful to the common goal that all of those professionals and service providers and families have, which is to be whole and healthy and secure.

And I think that we are beginning to see enough evidence that we are both providing better protection, we are improving prosecution and we are probably saving resources by having these multidisciplinary early investments in prevention and intervention when there is a crisis.

MR. HOLDER: Attorney General Reno, is there a little something you would like to share with us with regard to an announcement?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Last December President Clinton announced the availability of ten million dollars in Safestart grants to help up to 12 more cities develop initiatives like you saw just a few moments ago in New Haven, and the child development community policing project that brought together mental health specialists with community police officers.

Grant applications were due earlier this month, and grants will be awarded on September the 15th. At the Department of Justice we are proud to support programs like the New Haven project, and we look forward to supporting the implementation of similar programs across the country.

Today I am pleased to announce that an additional 1.3 million dollars will be awarded to the Yale Child Study Center to serve as a national center for information on children exposed to violence and on law enforcement partnerships.

The center will provide technical assistance and training to Safestart grantees, and will devote special attention to the link between early victimization and later juvenile and adult criminality.

I know this center will serve as an important resource for all communities who would like to find out how to do it. And to answer your question, this investment is going to save money down the line. Every dollar invested in children early on in the right way is going to save us dollars. It's not a matter of more dollars, it's a matter of using them smarter. And in terms of public health, with the center like the Yale Center, with so many other centers, we have seen a new partnership created in the last several years between the criminal justice system and the public health system, and it is exciting about what can be done when the two disciplines come together.

(Applause.)

MR. HOLDER: We have spent a good deal of time talking about the need to develop effective prevention and intervention programs, but even with all of these efforts in place undoubtedly and unfortunately there will be children who are going to be the victims of or witnesses to violence who enter our criminal justice system.

We must make sure our justice system does not revictimize our children as we work to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. We must adopt special investigative methods and innovative trial techniques to maximize the ability of children to convey accurate information, and that minimize additional trauma.

Children's advocacy centers are one of our best approaches. Child advocacy centers provide a multidisciplinary environment where law enforcement officers, child protection workers, prosecutors, victim advocates and therapists work together and coordinate interviews of child victims and witnesses in a non-threatening child friendly setting.

Streamlined, developmentally appropriate interviews reduce the stress to the child and ensure that prosecutors have the best possible evidence available to make their case.

Now, we're fortunate to have a fully extraordinary children's advocacy center right here in Washington, D.C. Let's watch them at work.

(A video is played.)

MR. HOLDER: When I was a United States attorney here in Washington, D.C., I saw how effective that child advocacy center could be. Attorney General Reno, how effective can these institutions be; can they help children, can they help prosecutors? What do you see as the value in them?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: They can make all the difference in the world. They can change the courtroom from an ominous strange place to a place that is comfortable. They can change the process from a place that children dread to a place where they see their friends and where they see people who will give them reinforcement.

Children can be very good witnesses. Some of them aren't. Adults can be very good witnesses. Some of them aren't. But if we create the environment in which the child can be at their best, we can truly make a difference, both in their experience and in terms of their ability to testify truthfully and accurately as to what happened.

MR. HOLDER: Based on your experience, what special needs do you think children have with regards to courtroom testimony and trying to share information with a jury?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: They have the same needs you and I have. If we're in a strange place with a lot of strange people firing questions at us, we're not going to be at ease. But if we've sat down and had people fire questions at us and go through the process and know what to expect, we're going to be a lot more at ease and if we have people who are civil to us and are understanding, we're going to be a lot more at ease.

I think you can get to the truth, which is the ultimate concern in the courtroom, while at the same time treating that child as a child should be treated.

MR. HOLDER: What do you think about the idea of legislation to force jurisdictions to take into account the special needs of children as they are going to be testifying or interacting in the criminal justice system?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I'm not one of those that says, legislate it into effect. I'm one that says, go out and persuade people that it will be in their best interest to do it, that by helping the child through a process like this you can make a tremendous difference in crime down the road. You can make that child whole. You can make them a productive member of society for the future, and you can also get a conviction a lot easier.

And then I like to try to figure out how I can help them find the money, because if you pass the legislation but the appropriations bill does not contain the money, that does not help very much, either.

And so I like to try to persuade people, let's get it funded, let's work it out, let's get a private not-for-profit to help us, let's do so much in terms of finding resources in the community that can truly make a difference.

MR. HOLDER: Ann, from your perspective and putting yourself in the place of a prosecutor, given that social background that you have, what do you think the special needs are, the special things that prosecutors and people in law enforcement ought to be aware of as they interact with children?

MS. ROSEWATER: I think the Attorney General said something very, very important, which is that we need to listen to victims whether they are children or parents. We need to hear what they are saying, because they are speaking truth.

But we need to work with them and treat them in a respectful way, or we won't get truth. We'll get, and we'll



perpetuate, fear and struggle. And we will neither be able to help those children and their parents find safety and stability. Nor will we be able to hold batterers, child abusers, people who hurt children, we will not be able to hold them accountable for their actions in the ways that we should.

So I think that the benefit that accrues from having both preventive and intervention strategies as well as court-based strategies is that there is some continuum of activity that needs to occur.

People need to follow the situations of these children and of these families, and share information. And having appropriate services and support systems and settings at all of these points along the continuum is really quite critical.

MR. HOLDER: Attorney General Reno, you and Ann both talked about obtaining truth. Some might say that if you put children in the hands of prosecutors and law enforcement officers in these children's advocacy centers, the truth that they will get or that the court will get will be the prosecutors' truth.

Any concerns about that, and how do we address those concerns if they are legitimate?

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: I think it is very important that we train people in how to interview children, to avoid the leading question, to understand what the law requires in terms of an appropriate question that does not elicit a specific answer. I think the prosecutor has got to be trained in the same effort, and again, if we consider that if you brought in an elderly person and sat them down, you would inquire of them and they might be a little forgetful, but you don't lead them. You tell them what to expect, you treat them in a kindly fashion. There's nothing that says you cannot treat somebody, even a witness, in a kind and gentle and thoughtful way. And it is a matter of common sense.

But I think there is also much to be learned about how we interview children to avoid the leading question, to avoid suggesting the answer.

MR. HOLDER: We've spent a good deal of time focusing on the victims of abuse and other violent crime. What are we doing to hold perpetrators accountable? I understand that you have some things you would like to share with us.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: Well, there are a number of documents that we are announcing today. First of all, the first is Breaking the Cycle of Violence, Recommendations to Improve the Criminal Justice Response to Child Victims and Witnesses, and I think that this will be very useful to people in terms of what is necessary for a multidisciplinary approach.

How can you develop centers, what can be done to truly make a difference in a child's life. Here is another booklet, entitled Children Exposed to Violence, Recommendations for State Justice Systems.

This is designed to allow procedures and to suggest procedures that would permit children to testify through closed circuit TV, while at the same time giving the defendant the right to confront in an appropriate way, but again this can make a significant difference.

And then here is a Children Exposed to Violence, the Criminal Justice Resources. It talks about again what can be done. The Office of Victims of Crime has put this together, and they have done so much, not just for child victims, but for others in terms of focusing on what can make a difference, and people who have to participate in the system.

And finally, we have a booklet entitled Use of Computers in the Sexual Exploitation of Children. I think this can provide some very helpful information for law enforcement as to what to watch out for, what to look for and how to handle matters such as this.

I hope these might be useful.

MR. HOLDER: I'm sure they will be. Well, we have in front of us 200 of our nation's leading policy makers and leaders in the fields of law enforcement, mental and physical health, domestic violence, early childhood education and child protective services.

Over the course of these past three days they have come together to refine a national action plan, to address the vital needs of child crime victims and witnesses.

Now, this comprehensive blueprint for local action will serve as a model to communities as they design strategies to prevent children's exposure to violence, to intervene early and more effectively when children tragically do become victims or witnesses, and to make certain that individuals who perpetrate crimes against children are held accountable and brought to justice.

I'm very proud that we're going to releasing a framework for that plan today, and copies of that will be available or are available outside for everybody to take home and to take with you when you leave today.

We at the Justice Department, through our office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, will support a series of state forums throughout the upcoming year that will focus on the link between child maltreatment and delinquency, and will continue the work of this summit.

We also encourage you to organize summits within your states on the many critical issues relating to children exposed to violence. Reach out to your state and local policy makers to implement the recommendations listed in the forthcoming National Action Plan.

Return to your communities and pledge to make a real difference in the lives of victimized children. They need your help.

I'm very pleased to introduce now Senator Ted Kennedy from

Massachusetts who is actually going to respond to this call for action.

Senator Kennedy.

(Applause.)

SENATOR KENNEDY: Thank you very much, Eric Holder, Attorney General Reno, Secretary Shalala and all of our various guests that are here this noontime and for this extremely important conference.

I want to first of all thank Attorney General Reno and Eric Holder and the president for focusing attention to this issue, and to give focus and a forum to parents, children, law enforcement, caregivers and to outline various recommendations that can be useful and helpful to communities all across the country.

And I think one of the most valuable aspects of this conference is what Eric Holder has just mentioned, and that is the possibilities that we have these kinds of conferences all over the country. And we in Boston, in Massachusetts on July 26 with Governor Salucci and Mayor Menino, ourselves, the congressional delegation, are going to have a similar kind of conference to try and find out what is working and working well in our own communities in Massachusetts so that those communities can share that information all over our state and perhaps relevant in terms of what they can mean in terms of other parts of the country, and we're looking forward to working very closely with the administration as my colleagues are in the congress and senate, and working very closely with all of you and your brothers and sisters across this country in this endeavor.

I start off with the viewpoint that even prior to the time of these tragic school killings and shootings we were still losing 13 children every single day. And with the tragedies that we have seen in the schools, they have given focus and attention to what is happening in too many other communities all across our nation.

And there has been a recognition that the problems of violence and children is not an easy answer. Even if we were able to resolve the kinds of issues of access and availability to guns, which I strongly support, but that's only part of the problem.

But it is certainly one of the important aspects of the challenge. We shouldn't say that because we cannot solve all of the problem that we're not going to take some steps to reduce the types of incidents of violence that are taking place. And so much of the focus of the debate that we have seen in the house of representatives and the senate of the United States was the access to weapons that are going to be used in killings, but we know what happens with those weapons, that there is a greater number of accidental shootings. And we also know through the growth of suicide in our community, particularly among teenagers, is something which is enormously important.

And when you realize that 19-year-olds are only four percent of nation's population, and commit 25 percent of the homicides, you'd think that we in the congress would understand that reducing the accessibility and the availability of weapons to that group might make some difference in terms of homicide just generally within the community.

But before we even had these issues, we're very mindful of the kinds of challenges that are affecting children that are going to intercity schools. So many of the children that attend the schools in Boston come from abusive households, abusive in the forms of either substance abuse or physical abuse. And there's very little there in the schools of our urban areas or in our rural areas that is available and accessible to them to help those children.

There are a few there, but we have not done a good job in trying to help and assist local communities and states because they have gotten involved in other kinds of tangential issues which become more evident if there is a siting of a health clinic in a particular school, other kinds of policies.

But we have to find ways to trying to reach out to these children and reach out to the parents for those that are coming to school, and we ought to find ways of working within the schools.

I'm on the education committee, and we need your help and insights as to what recommendations you have for all of us as legislators, as we are beginning the reshaping of what we call the elementary secondary education, which is the primary instrument which the federal government provides help and assistance to local communities, targeted resources, primarily in the K through 12 areas and primarily in the early grades.

We need your help and assistance to try and give us insight about what changes or alterations there ought to be in the Headstart program that is reaching out to many of the children in this. And to the Earlystart program, since we've extended that to zero to three. And this is of course an area where children are both vulnerable, and we ought to understand how we should be able to work with local communities in these areas.

We need your help and assistance as our committee is looking at the whole mental health reauthorization, about what recommendations you can have for us in dealing with the areas of mental health and children, and also with adults and their actions on children. How should we take a look now, virtually de novo, to these kinds of programs.

So much of this as I mentioned is program-oriented, and we know that the basic core problem is not going to lend itself really just to programs. We know in our own communities that it has made a difference in the schools, are smaller classrooms, are teachers knowing the name of every student, and the student knowing the name of every teacher and the teacher knowing the names of all the parents and the parents knowing the names of the teachers.

We know the importance of support groups in schools, so that children can work with their fellow students to help and assist if they're facing challenge, and hopefully they

can get mentors who will work with them in schools.

So many of these kinds of ideas that are out there need your kind of input, and the kind of input that can come from these recommendations that are going to be taking place in the series of forums. It's a children's issue.

I'm often reminded that children are only 20 percent of our population, but they're 100 percent of our future, and we ought to get it right when we're talking about children, and I look forward to working with all of you, with these recommendations and those that are coming from across the country to try and make a difference.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. HOLDER: Thank you, Senator Kennedy, for taking that leadership role in responding to the national call for action.

Attorney General Reno, maybe a last comment from you.

ATTORNEY GENERAL RENO: You in the audience have shown us time and again that we can make a difference in a child's life, that we can teach children how to resolve conflicts, that we can solve substance abuse problems, that we can bring communities together in a coordinated multidisciplinary effort to make a difference.

It is happening in this country today. Cities like Boston that have lost children to gun homicides, Boston isn't losing children to gun homicides. We can do it. And so every community in this country should join together, doctors, lawyers, criminal justice specialists, parks and recreation specialists, victims' advocates, the faith community, the business community and say how are we going to put the building blocks in place that give our children a chance to grow in a strong and positive way.

Health care, parenting skills, proper supervision, Educare,

mental health care, truancy prevention, afternoon and evening programs that provide proper supervision, good schooling that prepares them for the technology of the next century, opportunities to do school to work programs that give them skills that can enable them to earn a living wage; we can do it, because of what you all have done and what communities across this nation are doing.

(Applause.)

MR. HOLDER: I want to thank our esteemed panelists for sharing some time with us. I want to thank also Senator Kennedy for his response to our national call for action. I want to thank all of you for being with us over the last three days. We should all understand that the work before is really has just begun.

I want to thank especially our partners at Court TV for spending time with us and making the resources that they have made available so that this conference could occur. You've done a great public service.

We look forward to working with all of you. We look forward to having those state forums as were described by Senator Kennedy. As I said, our work has just begun, but our work is in service to the children of this nation. We can have no more important work.

Thank you very much.

(Whereupon, at approximately 1:30 o'clock p.m., the conference was adjourned.)