



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16, 2014
WWW.JUSTICE.GOV

AG
(202) 514-2007
TTY (866) 544-5309

**REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY ATTORNEY GENERAL ERIC
HOLDER AT THE 2014 POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM**

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Thank you, Chuck [Wexler], for those kind words – and for your exemplary leadership, over the past two decades, as Executive Director of the Police Executive Research Forum. I also want to thank my good friend, Philadelphia Police Commissioner [Charles] Ramsey, for his outstanding work as this organization's President. And I want to recognize PERF's Board of Directors and professional staff for all they've done to bring us together for today's important Summit.

Since its founding in 1976 – the same year I reported for work as a line attorney in the Justice Department's Public Integrity Section – this group has worked hard to strengthen community policing, to minimize the use of force, and to guide and inform our national debate about criminal justice issues. Over the years, you've helped to refine law enforcement's response to crimes ranging from sexual assaults to active shooter situations. Your members and leaders have promoted the highest standards of integrity, professionalism, accountability, and ethics. And your consistent emphasis on proven, data-driven policing strategies and practices has bolstered the efficiency – and the effectiveness – of departments and agencies throughout the nation.

That's why I'm so proud to stand with you today – as this Forum convenes once again to discuss one of the most urgent and complex challenges facing public safety professionals in this country: the question of how best to combat illegal drug use – and confront the stunning rise in heroin and prescription opiate overdose deaths that so many of you have witnessed in the jurisdictions you serve.

Especially over the last few years, we've come to understand that the cycle of heroin abuse all too often begins with prescription opiate abuse. Throughout America – between 2006 and 2010 – heroin overdose deaths increased by an alarming 45 percent. This staggering rise is a tragic, but hardly unpredictable, symptom of the significant increase in prescription drug abuse we've seen over the past decade. And it has impelled law enforcement leaders to fight back aggressively.

As you know as well as anyone, addressing this public health and public safety crisis will require a combination of rigorous enforcement and robust treatment. I want to assure you this afternoon that the Justice Department is, and always will be, firmly committed to both.

As we speak, with DEA as our lead agency, the Department is doing more than ever to keep illicit drugs off our streets – and bring dangerous or violent traffickers to justice. Since just 2011, DEA has opened more than 4,500 investigations related to heroin. As a result of this work, the amount of heroin seized along America’s southwest border increased by more than 320 percent between 2008 and 2013. And our comprehensive enforcement strategy is also enabling us to attack all levels of the supply chain – so we can proactively investigate the diversion of pharmaceutical controlled substances and prevent them from falling into the wrong hands.

From practitioners who illegally dispense prescriptions, to pharmacists who knowingly fill them; from notorious “pill mills,” to unscrupulous distributors that send controlled substances downstream without due diligence – DEA is standing vigilant against anyone who would divert prescription opiates from their legitimate use. In targeted areas, they’re also using their regulatory authority to review and investigate new pharmacy applications – so they can identify and prevent storefront traffickers from obtaining DEA registrations.

This work shows tremendous promise – and it’s having a significant positive impact. But all of it is only the beginning – because my colleagues and I understand, as you do, that although vigorous enforcement will always be critical, enforcement on its own will never be enough.

That’s why we’re partnering with leaders like you – and organizations like PERF – to increase our support for education, prevention, and treatment. We’re working with doctors, pharmacists, and other health professionals – along with educators, community leaders, and police officers on the front lines – to identify and prevent controlled substance diversion during the health care delivery process. Nationwide, we’re supporting more than 2,600 specialty courts that connect over 120,000 people with the services they need to avoid future drug use and return to their communities from incarceration. And we’re focusing our engagement efforts on specific areas where this work is most needed – and where it can make the most difference.

For example, in Ohio’s Northern District, our United States Attorney convened a summit at the Cleveland Clinic to bring together law enforcement and public health professionals to confront that area’s 400-percent rise in heroin-related deaths. Another U.S. Attorney’s Office – in Vermont – partnered with a family whose young son tragically lost his life to a heroin overdose. Together, they created an award-winning documentary, called “The Opiate Effect,” to raise awareness about the devastating consequences of opiate abuse.

This powerful video has already reached more than 50,000 people. But as law enforcement leaders, each of us has an obligation to do even more. That’s why, today, I’m calling on all first responders – including state and local law enforcement agencies – to train and equip their men and women on the front lines to use the overdose-reversal drug known as naloxone.

When administered in a timely manner, naloxone – also known as narcan – can restore breathing to someone experiencing a heroin or opioid overdose. This critical tool can save lives. To date, a total of 17 states and the District of Columbia have taken steps to increase access to naloxone, resulting in over 10,000 overdose reversals since 2001. And I urge state policymakers and local leaders throughout the nation to take additional steps to increase the availability of naloxone among first responders – so we can provide lifesaving aid to more and more of those who need it.

After all, it's only by working together – and adopting a holistic approach – that we can confront this crisis, strengthen our communities, and save lives. That's why my colleagues and I are committed to supporting you. And we're determined to ensure that limited public safety resources are targeted to the most dangerous types of drugs – and the most serious drug offenses.

As you know, last August, I launched a new “Smart on Crime” initiative that's enabling the Department of Justice to do just that – by using evidence-based reforms to improve the federal criminal justice system across the board, and to make our expenditures both smarter and more productive. Going forward, the Department will work with Congress to secure the passage of President Obama's budget request, which includes \$173 million to sustain and advance this effort. And we'll strive to enact commonsense reforms like the bipartisan Smarter Sentencing Act – which would give judges additional discretion in determining appropriate sentences for people convicted of certain federal drug crimes.

In every case and circumstance, our efforts will continue to be guided by the recognition that – while smart law enforcement will always play a critical role in protecting communities from drug crime, we will never be able to arrest our way to becoming a safer nation. We'll keep relying on innovative leaders like you to apply 21st century solutions to 21st century problems. And we'll never stop driving investments in the kinds of groundbreaking research – and data-driven strategies – that so many of you have long championed.

This afternoon, as we come together to discuss this work – and to renew our shared commitment to carry it into the future – I want you to know how proud, and humbled, I am to count you as colleagues and partners. I thank you – and all of this Forum's members – once again for your service, your leadership, and your patriotism. And I look forward to all that we must, and surely will, achieve together in the days ahead.