

For release
upon delivery

EXTRACTS FROM THE REMARKS

of

HONORABLE HOMER CUMMINGS

Attorney General of the United States

delivered at a meeting

of the

WASHINGTON CRIMINAL JUSTICE ASSOCIATION, INC.,

at the

WILLARD HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D. C.

MONDAY, JANUARY 24, 1938

11:30 A. M.

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Attorney General Cummings said:

There is small hope for improvement of crime conditions in any community so long as the great body of citizenry remains indifferent, uninformed or hostile. The stirring of public opinion to demand that criminal activities be stamped out is perhaps the most fundamental factor in the whole problem.

The crime situation in the District of Columbia amounts to a national disgrace. Washington should be a model city. It should stand first in law enforcement and last in the number of crimes committed.

Authentic statistics, covering the period from July to September, 1937, inclusive, indicate that out of 93 cities with a population of over 100,000, Washington ranks in the ten percent of cities with the most crime and that Washington is tenth from the top of a list in the number of murders and non-negligent manslaughters. In the number of aggravated assaults it is eighth from the top of the list. In the number of automobile thefts it is seventh. In the number of thefts under \$50.00 it is sixth. In the number of thefts over \$50.00 it is third. In the number of robberies it is seventh. In the number of aggravated assaults it is eighth. In the number of burglaries and housebreakings it is fifth.

One can make all the allowances he may wish for differences in assembling statistical information and the peculiar problems of a capital city and other differentiating factors, but the bold fact remains that Washington is far too near the top in the list of ill-ordered communities.

Our resourcefulness, as a city and as a Nation, is at a low level if we can't control major crimes and racketeering in an area of seventy square miles. The District of Columbia should be a model for the country - clean and free from lawlessness. Instead, it stands forth conspicuously as a crime center.

The subject presented covers a wide range. It helps little to place the blame upon any single factor. Washington should be an ideal city from every standpoint; recreation, health, housing, police, prosecution, courts, prisons, and so on.

The civic conscience cannot be clear so long as slums nestle in the shadow of the Capitol.

And what of our juvenile delinquents? Since the turn of the century juvenile courts have sprung up in virtually every State in the Union. In the District of Columbia, however, we still cling to what is little more than a criminal court for children. We employ a medieval approach to juvenile delinquency and we do it to the accompaniment of complaints, pleas, trials, juries, convictions and imprisonment. Such procedures are nothing short of stupid.

It is my belief that the men in key positions in the District of Columbia are alive to these problems and are working valiantly toward their solution, but we need more policemen; we need more prosecutors; we need more judges; in fact our list of needs is a long one. The dockets of the Courts of the District of Columbia, both civil and criminal, are way behind, and while strenuous efforts are being made by the United States Attorney and his staff to reduce the number of pending cases, the fact

remains that we shall never catch up until additional personnel and additional judges are secured.

In the nation's Capital we have a mediocre penal system. While such matters are outside the jurisdiction of the Department of Justice, nevertheless, I was sufficiently interested to visit some of the institutions within the past year and submit a list of suggestions for the improvement of the District penal institutions. The jail is ancient and unsanitary. The probation facilities in the District are handicapped.

The time has arrived for a complete renovation of the organic laws relating to the District. At the present time the relationship between the Federal Government and the District is in a state of confusion. The penal system is not integrated. Adequate classification of prisoners is practically impossible and the personnel should be brought within Civil Service requirements.

There is much to be done, but law enforcement will not thrive so long as the District is starving for funds.

A community never secures effective law enforcement unless it not only wants it but demands it, and has the financial means of securing it. The Washington Criminal Justice Association has carved out for itself a tremendous task, but it is one so essential to the dignity and well-being of the Nation's Capital that no worthy citizen can fail to lend the fullest support.