

**Attorney General Speech for the  
National Violence Prevention Conference  
on October 25, Des Moines, Iowa**

**Introduction**

Thank you for that kind introduction and thank you for your leadership in addressing the critical issue of violence in our country. And to those of you who are here from cities and towns across the country, who are working every day to address the problem of violence in our country, thank you for your hard work and commitment.

Why do I, as Attorney General of the United States come to speak with you today on this issue? It is because in 1978, as I assumed the role of Chief Prosecutor in Dade County, Florida, our medical examiner, a wonderful doctor, called me and said, "Why don't you come look at our records and see who has been killed in Dade County in the last twenty years? And lets formulate a strategy to do something about it."

With interns we looked at those records and found that forty percent of homicides over that time period were related to domestic violence - husband/wife, boyfriend/girlfriend, ex-spouse. In response, we developed a domestic intervention program. Other physicians were not as enlightened as our medical examiner, and it was sometimes slow work trying to bring the medical community along with the criminal justice practitioners as we worked together to address. We were also slow in bringing judges along and police officers.

At the same time, I was concerned about juvenile delinquency. Soon after I took office, I looked at our pre-sentence investigations of the juveniles that we were prosecuting

and saw so many steps along the way where we could have intervened to make a difference in that child's life. Save the community from crime and save the child from arrest and incarceration. I looked for causal effects, and there was a clear correlation between dropout and delinquency. Realizing that I would never be able to build enough facilities in the juvenile justice system if I waited until the child was an adjudicated delinquent, we started working with the educational community to prevent dropout.

Now, a few years later, this conference has brought together the American Medical Association, Juvenile and Family Court Judges, teachers, public health professionals, community leaders, and a broad array of other disciplines in recognition of the importance and effectiveness of collaboration and prevention.

We should feel proud of what we have accomplished.

Every day, we are learning more about what we can do to reduce violence and this conference has advanced that knowledge by bridging the rigor of science and the experience of program. I think both medicine and law have suffered too long in this country from people who are willing to wait for the crisis to occur, for the specialist to be needed, for the lawyer to try the case, for the public defender to protect the child. Today, the disciplines recognize that they must work together. The teacher, the parks and recreation specialist, the businessman, the prosecutor, all of us coming together. But this is not easy work.

When I first became Attorney General, people used to ask why I talked about prevention. Today, I find that the police chiefs, county commissioners, sheriffs, and people on the front lines engaged in addressing the problem of violence, are the first to say that we

need more prevention to fight crime.

As a result of efforts of Americans across this country, of citizens, of young people who care and who speak out, we have seen an overall reduction in violence in this Nation in the last year that is very, very encouraging. But, ladies and gentlemen, we have also seen something that is very, very alarming.

Since 1985, we have seen an increase in this Nation in youth violence that is staggering, just simply staggering. And with the tragedy of violence perpetrated by young people has also come the horrible phenomena, the tragic phenomena, of young people as the victim of that violence.

And what makes this surge so very frightening is that it occurred, for the most part, while the number of young people in the age category of 14 to 17 was going down in the United States.

But, in the next twenty years -- the demographics of this Nation make it quite clear - - the number of young people in the age group of 14 to 17 will increase significantly. One study projects that if the youth population and the rate of juvenile arrests for violent crimes continue to increase at the same rate as we have seen during the past decade, by the year 2010, violent juvenile crimes will more than double. Unless we come together to prevent this violence, we are going to see a more violent nation. Because of your efforts, because of programs you have heard about over the past few days, I think we are going to turn it around.

But we need to do more.

## COPS, Youth Handgun Initiative and Youth Focused Community Oriented Policing

To fight crime and violence in our communities, it is clear that the first thing that is needed is additional resources. It has been just a little over a year ago that the Congress passed President Clinton's Crime Act, a law that focused not just on punishment, not just on policing, but on prevention as well.

Community Policing is a perfect example of a critical partnership that must be made in order to build trust in our neighborhoods and safety on our streets. The Crime Act provided monies for 100,000 community police officers in the next five years and we have already authorized 25,000 officers, far more than people said we would be able to do in the first year. We have cut through red tape. We have tried to work with communities to design community policing programs that were based on what the community said it needed. It might be one deputy Sheriff in a county; it might be 35 police officers in a major urban city; but in each case, we are supporting community policing.

Through these efforts, we are beginning to see the rate of violent crime decrease in communities across the country. In Lowell, Massachusetts, for the first time in 25 years they had a year pass without a single homicide. Community policing has brought renewed peace of mind and safety to residents.

In Jefferson Parish, Louisiana, where people were so afraid of stray bullets that they used to sleep in the hallways. With help from the Crime Act, things have changed. Instead of three violent crimes a month, Jefferson Parish has suffered only four in 11 months.

In Aurora, Illinois, where drug trafficking was out of control, a local road named Kane Street was called "cocaine street." Not any more. Thanks to a tough community

policing initiative that put drug dealers out of business.

And now I am beginning to see it across the country. As community police officers reach out in crime prevention as well as crime detection efforts, making a difference.

I was gratified to see that the Senate, this past month, continued the President's Community Policing program. And I look forward to making sure that we continue to develop initiatives that can make a difference.

To that end, I am very proud that the Community Policing program focused on youth violence and recently announced an initiative which will provide money to 10 police departments across the country for specific programs targeted at the youth gun violence that makes youth violence so deadly. These communities will use gun stops, curfew checks and other targeted enforcement strategies to keep guns out of the hands of juveniles. And, most importantly, the lessons we learn from this initiative will be carefully evaluated so that we can help other cities and towns fight juvenile violence in their communities.

I am also pleased to tell you about a Youth-Focused Community Policing Initiative we have developed to assist law enforcement officers to work closely with social service agencies, schools, and community residents to better address the needs of our children. Together, these initiatives reflect the balanced approach the Department is taking in addressing crime and violence. They also reflect a public health approach by addressing the multiple causes of youth gun violence: from the accessibility of guns to the reasons youth carry guns and use them.

## Drugs

Drugs are another example where law enforcement can gain from collaboration with health and treatment services. We have seen with our own eyes what crack and drugs can do to a neighborhood, to a school, or to a family.

Drug Court is the type of tough enforcement program which is also a prevention program that can work. The Drug Court program says, "If you are a first time, non-violent offender and drug user, we will be tough but fair and work with you. We will have a judge supervise you. We will provide treatment. We will work with you in job training and placement. We will get you back to the community with a chance of success. But if you mess up, we are going to have this judge supervising you and you are going to jail."

That program is working in communities across the country. The Crime Act expands it. And I was gratified to see that the Senate agreed. We have got to make sure, as we go into conference, that these efforts are continued.

It may be a strategy to get guns out of the hands of children. It may be a program developed around the schools. But we are going to take the creative ingenuity that exists in America today to get the job done.

## Reduce Family Violence

We have also got to focus on building strong families that can care for their children. When we talk about crime prevention, when we start to talk about stopping violence in our schools and on our streets, it starts at home. Unless we raise the attention of this Nation to domestic violence, to violence against women, we are never going to stop

it in our schools and on our streets. The child who watches his father beat his mother comes to accept violence as a way of life. We have got to turn that around.

Heightening America's sensitivity to this type of violence is critical. We must continue to bring the medical community, the criminal justice community, and the private sector together to say we are not going to tolerate this any more. We are going to take action.

The Crime Act provided monies for efforts against domestic violence. We have already distributed almost ½ million dollars as a down payment on the fight against domestic violence to each State in this country, for expanded shelters, for innovative policing programs, for domestic violence centers, based on what communities know they need because they understand their communities better. I was gratified again to see that the Senate agreed with the President and supported full funding of this initiative.

We must also pay equal attention to ending child abuse and neglect. A child who is abused early in life is more than twice as likely to be involved in delinquency and violence later in life. The Department is supporting efforts across this country to improve court responses to child abuse and neglect, so that families in need are linked to services that can help them.

### Strong Education

One of the greatest preventers of crime is a strong education. We have got to make sure that the schools of America continue to have the resources they need to train our children to the technology that will make them competitive with the rest of the world as we

come into a century of unprecedented high technology that we could never have imagined.

One of the greatest single correlations of delinquency and violence is between those who have dropped out or are truant and those that ultimately commit a delinquent act.

When that child is eight years old and truant for the first time, too often in America we are sending the child back to the school, the school calls home, the parent does not come get the child, and the school sends back out into the community and nobody does anything about it.

If we made a home visit with a community police officer and a social worker or public health nurse, we might find a parent who is reaching out begging for help. Working with the child's family, before the truancy becomes so entrenched that we cannot help the child and his or her family, could make a difference in the life of that child. We could do so much.

Through a joint effort with the Department of Education, we have produced an initiative to raise consciousness about the problem of these young people who are falling out of the mainstream of our educational system. We are also providing training and technical assistance to support the development of more creative ways of responding to these problems. It is so exciting to see what our children can achieve, if we give them the tools to do the job.

### After School Activities

Statistics also show that during the school hours, youth crime rates are relatively stable. But after 3:00, when children get out of school, crime rates go up. We have seen

what has happened in America with parents working overtime to get food on the table, with teachers that are overwhelmed, with recreation and services for young people being depleted, and with baseball diamonds going unused, and we know that from 3:00 to 6:00 in the afternoons and sometimes in the evenings we have children who are not supervised as we would want to see them supervised.

The Crime Act provided monies for afternoon and evening programs that provide for supervised activities, that can make our communities safer by lowering crime rates and can also make a difference in our children's lives. A Crime Act that can provide them with the supervision and the mentoring that they need to get started on the right foot. We must expand these programs and never pull back from that effort.

It has been so gratifying for me to go to different places in this country and see young people at work, developing peer mediation programs and conflict resolution programs in conjunction with specialists in their community. These programs are working and we need to spread them across America. If you can teach people how to spell, you can teach people how to resolve conflicts without knives and guns and fists. And we need to make sure that these programs have the resources to continue. In the last year, the Department of Justice has provided funds to communities to implement mentoring programs, and we have synthesized the most current information on what works and does not work to prevent delinquency into a Comprehensive Strategy for communities and local jurisdictions, and we are working hard to get that information to you.

## Comprehensive Strategy and Graduated Sanctions

Safe communities are critical to ensuring that young people can get to these programs safely and can access the opportunities we provide. But holding kids accountable for their actions is a very important part of providing them with opportunities.

Statistics show that a small segment of the juvenile offender population is responsible for most of the serious and violent juvenile crime. The Department of Justice is working in a partnership with the U.S. Attorneys and community-based collaboratives to identify this segment of the juvenile population, and to get them off the streets.

We are also working to support local juvenile justice systems in determining the danger a juvenile offender poses to the community, determining what is best for society as well as the offender, and providing appropriate sanctions that are swift, sure, and match the conduct.

The Department of Justice's Comprehensive Strategy combines community-wide risk assessments from the public health model with state-of-the-art juvenile justice research and practice, to produce a model continuum of sanctions and services to address juvenile delinquency and violence. We have produced an implementation guide for States and localities and are providing training and technical assistance across the country to help them bring together the key people they need to put this model into place.

## Partnerships

Crime prevention starts at home, but it also sets the stage for community action. A community police officer working in a public housing development can develop programs

aimed at crime prevention, can help organize citizens and young people not to engage in violence, and we can make a difference, ladies and gentlemen. And the people who convinced me that we can make a difference are people like you. People who care about this Nation, care about your community, and care about our children.

Ever since I came to Washington, I have tried to direct the attention of the Department of Justice towards collaboration and partnership with community. The neighborhoods, the cities, the counties of America, understand their problems better than we do in Washington. They understand their needs and resources. They understand what they need to get the job done.

And it is the Federal Government's responsibility to use our resources in partnership with State and local governments and law enforcement in the best way possible to enhance what people are doing on the front line, in the streets and in the towns of America.

We have formed a number of valuable partnerships in the Department of Justice. With CDC to look into the problem of gun violence and domestic violence; with the Department of Education to address truancy; with public housing to solve the gang problem; with AmeriCorps to provide opportunities for young people to contribute to their communities; and we're already taking advantage of the effectiveness that results when we work together. But there is still more to be done.

We must bring what is happening at the community and federal level together: the public and private; the researchers and practitioners; parents and youth. These partnerships are key to our success. Fear and despair feed violence. But ingenuity, strong partnerships and targeted strategies will provide what we need to turn this epidemic around. There are

encouraging signs of success; and we must work with the media to get that message out.

### Conclusion

When I first came to Washington, too many people said to me, Janet, the problem is just so overwhelming. Yes, if you look at a nation as a whole you think, what can we do? But these people know they can do something. Each one of us can do something. And all Americans must accept the challenge, child by child, family by family, school by school, block by block, city by city, State by State, take back America for our children again. And give them a chance, give them a community, give them a nation where they can grow as strong, constructive human beings.

Children are the toughest little people I know. They can overcome so much if they are given half a chance. Let us do more. Let us give our children a full chance to show what they can do. And they will prove us so very proud.