



## Law Day Remarks

Nearly forty years ago, when President John F. Kennedy first proclaimed Law Day, he urged all Americans to rededicate themselves to the ideals of equality and justice under law. This challenge is just as urgent for us today. As the Attorney General of the United States, I am proud to lead a Department of Justice where thousands of employees work to advance the cause of justice throughout our Nation. In traveling around the country, I am repeatedly impressed by the tireless efforts of prosecutors and law enforcement officers -- federal, state, local and tribal -- to protect our citizens and promote criminal justice.

On Law Day this year, I ask that you join me in supporting efforts to realize our Nation's pledge of "justice for all." Our legal system depends on the confidence of every citizen. Americans strongly support our legal system, but many question whether it dispenses justice evenly. Too many Americans think that our legal system does not treat crime victims fairly. Too many think that it favors the wealthy over the poor. And too many lack effective access to the civil legal system because they cannot afford a lawyer.

Let us commit ourselves to making the law work for every American. We must support the voices of victims and make sure the broader community is heard in the criminal justice process. Even with our great success in reducing crime rates, millions of Americans are victimized by crime each year. Low-income Americans are the most vulnerable and the most likely to become victims of crime.

Law enforcement officers, prosecutors and others who work to vindicate the rights of victims deserve our praise and support. It is especially fitting that we acknowledge their efforts as part of Law Day, which this year concludes National Crime Victims' Rights Week.

Through community policing, community prosecution, and community courts, the voices of victims and others are being heard and respected in the criminal justice system. These initiatives make the law work better by including all citizens and responding to community concerns.

Justice in criminal cases also demands that poor people accused of crimes receive

legal assistance. Our Constitution guarantees defendants the right to a lawyer in major criminal cases. We preserve this right for indigent defendants through public defenders or appointed counsel. Working as a prosecutor for 15 years, I learned that our criminal justice system cannot function properly unless we have adequate funding, training, and resources for indigent defense.

If we do not adequately support criminal defense for poor Americans, people will think that you only get justice if you can afford to pay a lawyer. This perception would undermine confidence in our system. Skimping on adequate representation also hurts effective law enforcement by creating delays and leading to the reversal of convictions on appeal.

Finally, we must work to meet the need for civil legal services for low-income Americans. Poor women and children need this help the most. Nearly two-thirds of the clients of legal services programs are women, most of them mothers. Nearly one-sixth of all cases handled by legal services offices involve domestic violence. But each day, thousands of Americans who deserve civil justice cannot afford it. Legal services programs need more resources.

Access to civil justice for poor Americans is also aided by pro bono efforts by thousands of public and private lawyers. I applaud this work and reaffirm the Justice Department's support for pro bono and community service work by its employees. I urge all lawyers to join me in adopting a personal goal of performing at least 50 hours of pro bono or other volunteer service each year.

Justice for all is a noble ideal. On Law Day this year, I hope you will join me in renewing our pledge to make it a reality. Let us make sure the law protects all Americans.