



Department of Justice

STATEMENT

OF

MELODEE HANES

ACTING ADMINISTRATOR

OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION

OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATIVE OVERSIGHT AND THE COURTS

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AT A HEARING ENTITLED

“TRAINING OF CHILD PROTECTION PROFESSIONALS TO RECOGNIZE AND

RESPOND TO

CASES OF CHILD ABUSE”

MAY 23, 2012

**Melodee Hanes
Acting Administrator
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
Office of Justice Programs
U.S. Department of Justice**

**Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight and the Courts
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate**

**“Training of Child Protection Professionals to Recognize and Respond to
Cases of Child Abuse”
May 23, 2012**

Chairwoman Klobuchar, Ranking Member Sessions, and distinguished members of this Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the importance of training child protection professionals to help them recognize and respond to cases of child abuse. I also appreciate the opportunity to tell you more about the great work being done by the Department of Justice in the areas of child protection and youth violence intervention and prevention.

My name is Melodee Hanes and I serve as the Acting Administrator for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) at the Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Justice Programs (OJP). Our mission at OJJDP is to provide national leadership, coordination, and resources to respond to the needs of our youth who come into contact with the criminal justice system. As a part of this mission, it is one of our overarching priorities to prevent and respond to child victimization and exploitation.

I personally understand the importance of adequate investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases. As a prosecutor with over 30 years of public service in state courts, I have dedicated much of my career to protecting and seeking justice for our nation’s children. During my tenure as a deputy county attorney in Polk County, Iowa and later in Yellowstone County, Montana, I prosecuted cases involving adults who committed acts of physical and sexual violence against children. In 1987, I prosecuted the first felony child endangerment case in Polk County, Iowa under the newly enacted Iowa Code Chapter 726 - Protection of the Family and Dependent Persons. Over the subsequent years, I handled more than 100 cases involving physical and sexual abuse of children. I have also worked to develop and coordinate local policy around child protection and have lectured and written on the subject for law school and professional audiences. So, I understand firsthand the important and necessary work being done by organizations that provide support to child protection professionals in their efforts to identify and respond effectively to cases of child abuse as well as other OJJDP programs that support essential training and assistance for law enforcement officers, prosecutors, judges, and child advocates. Currently, OJJDP supports nearly fifty projects that provide multi-disciplinary training on a broad range of child protection issues, including:

- the investigation and prosecution of sexual and physical abuse of children;

- policies and procedures to identify and assist child victims of sexual exploitation;
- enhanced investigative capabilities to detect, investigate and apprehend perpetrators of internet crimes against children;
- community responses to assist in the search for and safe recovery of missing children;
- trauma-informed care for children who have experienced violence and abuse; and
- court strategies that reduce the number of children in the child welfare system.

While budget constraints have limited funding for some programs aimed at enhancing the prosecution of child abuse cases, protecting America's children is one of the Attorney General's highest priorities. The Department must and will continue to do great work in these areas in spite of these challenges, through creative partnerships with agencies at federal, state and local levels.

OJJDP recently funded a study that showed 60 percent of children were exposed to some form of violence, crime or abuse, ranging from brief encounters as witnesses to serious violent episodes in the previous year. Research over the years has taught us that the consequences of such exposure are significant and widespread, often associated with long-term physical, psychological, and emotional harm. These children are more likely to be truant, perform poorly in school, abuse drugs and alcohol, suffer depression and engage in criminal behavior.

Research also tells us that early identification and intervention can be effective in countering the effects of violence, enhancing resiliency, and fostering healthy child development. In an effort to address this epidemic, the Department has implemented several major initiatives which include training and technical assistance for child protection professionals at the State and local level. As budgets continue to shrink and grant funding opportunities become increasingly more competitive, training and technical assistance will become even more vital to supporting our state, local, and tribal partners quickly and effectively.

THE DEFENDING CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE

In 2010, Attorney General Eric Holder launched the Defending Childhood Initiative, to help address the exposure of America's children to violence as victims and as witnesses. The Attorney General has been personally and professionally committed to this issue for many years, dating back to early in his career when he served as the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia and throughout his tenure at the Department of Justice.

Children's exposure to violence affects every one of us. Effectively addressing it must become our shared concern and our shared cause. Building on lessons learned from previously funded research and programs including Safe Start, the Child Development-Community Policing Program, and the Greenbook Initiative (which examined the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment), Defending Childhood leverages existing resources across DOJ to focus on preventing, addressing, reducing, and more fully understanding childhood exposure to violence.

In 2010, the Department of Justice awarded grants to cities and tribal communities in eight sites around the country: Portland, Maine; Boston, MA; Shelby County, TN; Cuyahoga

County, OH; Grand Forks, ND; Multnomah County, OR; the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota, and the Rocky Boy Reservation in Montana. Each of these communities developed strategic plans for comprehensive community-driven efforts to respond to violence in families, schools, and communities. Each of these sites received additional support in 2011 to help launch, sustain, and expand programs focused on the development of community-based solutions to address the problem. In addition to the demonstration program grants, DOJ is committing additional funding for research, evaluation, public awareness and training for professional members and affiliates of national organizations through the initiative.

In 2011, as a part of the Defending Childhood initiative, The Attorney General created the Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence (the Task Force) which is composed of 13 leading experts including practitioners, advocates, researchers, and licensed clinicians. The Task Force has held four public hearings in Baltimore, Miami, Albuquerque, and Detroit to explore the nature and extent of children's exposure to violence through the testimony of expert witnesses and survivors. Based on the testimony at these four public hearings, comprehensive research, and written testimony of individuals and organizations nationwide, the Defending Childhood Task Force will issue a final report to the Attorney General presenting its findings and comprehensive policy recommendations in the fall of 2012.

INTERNET CRIMES AGAINST CHILDREN (ICAC)

The Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force is administered by OJJDP and is a cornerstone of the Department's National Strategy for Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction. The ICAC Program is a national network of 61 task forces representing more than 3,000 federal, state, and local law enforcement and prosecutorial agencies. They are dedicated to developing effective responses to the online enticement of children by sexual predators, child exploitation, and child obscenity and pornography cases. The ICAC Program increases the investigative capabilities of state and local law enforcement officers and prosecutors in the detection and investigation of internet crimes against children and the apprehension of offenders. Since 1998, ICAC Task Forces have reviewed over 300,000 complaints of alleged child sexual victimization, resulting in 32,000 arrests. In fiscal year 2011 alone, ICAC investigations led to more than 5,800 arrests, over 45,000 forensic examinations, and the identification of thousands of children who were victims of some form of abuse and neglect. Since 1998, more than 350,000 law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and other professionals have been trained in the United States and in 17 countries on techniques to investigate and prosecute ICAC related cases.

AMBER ALERT (including tribal and Southern Border)

The AMBER Alert™ Program is a voluntary partnership between law-enforcement agencies, broadcasters, transportation agencies, and the wireless industry, to activate an urgent bulletin in the most serious child-abduction cases. The goal of an AMBER Alert is to instantly galvanize the entire community to assist in the search for and the safe recovery of the child.

OJJDP supports a national training and technical assistance program that prepares law enforcement, AMBER Alert coordinators, and other stakeholders to respond to child abduction and missing endangered children cases. OJJDP's efforts under this program have expanded to

include partnerships along the U.S./Canada border, the development of AMBER Alert programs in tribal communities, and continuing efforts to partner with states along both sides of the U.S./Mexico border. OJJDP partners with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to support program operations and enhancements, including the secondary distribution of AMBER Alerts issued by law enforcement.

To date, 572 children have been safely recovered and reunited with their families specifically because of AMBER Alerts.

NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN

Since 1984, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) has provided training and technical assistance on- and offsite for nearly 300,000 law enforcement, criminal/juvenile-justice, and healthcare professionals nationwide and in Canada. Through its Jimmy Ryce Law Enforcement Training Center (in Alexandria, VA) and the Polissen Law Enforcement Training Center (in Rochester, NY), the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children delivers training in child-sexual-exploitation and missing-child case detection, identification, investigation, and prevention.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN

OJJDP supports a number of training and technical assistance programs, collaborative demonstration programs, and research projects designed to address the commercial exploitation of children and assist its victims.

This fiscal year, the Department made over \$9 million in grant funding available to states and communities working to combat human trafficking through proactive law enforcement efforts and comprehensive victim services.

Last year, OJJDP funded three agencies under their Mentoring for Child Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation Initiative to develop or enhance the mentoring capacity of community service organizations that work with juvenile victims of commercial sexual exploitation and domestic sex trafficking, to increase outreach, and to provide services to these victims. This initiative also includes a technical assistance component to help these agencies achieve their project goals.

OJJDP also funded a project of the Institute of Medicine and the Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education of the National Academy of Sciences to study the commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking of minors in the United States. The study is being conducted by a committee of independent experts who are reviewing relevant research and practice-based literatures. The committee will prepare a final report that summarizes the research review and offer findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

THE NATIONAL FORUM ON YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention is a network of communities and federal agencies that work together, share information and build local capacity to prevent and reduce youth violence. Established at the direction of President Obama in 2010, the Forum brings together people from diverse professions and perspectives to learn from each other about the crisis of youth and gang violence in America and to build comprehensive solutions on the local and national level.

Participating Federal agencies include the Departments of Justice, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, and the Office on National Drug Control Policy. The Forum's first set of participating communities includes Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Memphis, Salinas, and San Jose with more to be added soon.

The Forum operates on three key principles:

- Multi-disciplinary partnerships are key to tackling this complex issue – police, educators, public health and other service providers, faith and community leaders, parents and kids, must all be at the table.
- Communities must balance and coordinate their prevention, intervention, enforcement and reentry strategies.
- Data and evidence-driven strategies must inform efforts to reduce youth violence in our country.

These three principles are critical to directing and leveraging limited resources in order to make a long-standing impact.

EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS

OJJDP has also been proactive in promoting evidence-based practices in juvenile justice. Although we have learned a lot of over the years, we still see practitioners using programs that are ineffective and may result in wasted time, money and resources.

We are working to educate practitioners on the value of evidence-based programs and promote our Model Programs Guide, which is a wonderful resource for the field. There are more than 200 evidence-based programs in the Guide, covering the entire continuum of services, from prevention to reentry.

Additionally, CrimeSolutions.gov was launched in 2010. The CrimeSolutions.gov website uses rigorous research to inform practitioners and policy makers about what works in criminal justice, juvenile justice, and crime victim services and includes nearly 200 programs covering a range of topics from victimization to substance abuse. These programs all come with a rating for effectiveness and information about their proven impact that will be of significant practical use to our partners in the field.

DIAGNOSTIC CENTER

This year OJP will open a State and Local Help Desk and Diagnostic Center. The Diagnostic Center is a one-stop shop for state and local leaders and agency heads seeking real-time diagnostic assistance and resources to solve public safety problems. The Diagnostic Center will operate a hotline, disseminate comprehensive training and technical assistance services focused on evidence-based practices, and support state and community executives in the implementation of evidence-based programs and practices in the field.

CONCLUSION

The programs I have highlighted are but a few efforts being supported by the Department and by our partners in the field to help protect our nation's children. I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to be here today and to testify at this important hearing. Together, we have a collective responsibility to keep this country's children safe from harm, and provide them with support if the unthinkable happens. OJJDP and our partners, at the state, local, and tribal levels are at the forefront on these issues and we look forward to continuing to work with the members on this Subcommittee and your staff on this substantive and important issue.