

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE OVERVIEW

Organization: Led by the Attorney General, the Department of Justice (DOJ or the Department) is comprised of approximately 40 components that have a broad array of national security, law enforcement, and criminal justice system responsibilities. DOJ prosecutes federal law offenders and represents the U.S. Government in court; its attorneys represent the rights and interests of the American people and enforce federal criminal and civil laws, including antitrust, civil rights, environmental, and tax laws; its Immigration Judges ensure justice for immigrants in removal proceedings; its special agents investigate organized and violent crime, illegal drugs, gun and explosives violations; its deputy marshals protect the federal judiciary, apprehend fugitives and transport persons in federal custody; and its correctional officers confine convicted federal offenders. DOJ also provides grants and training to state, local, and tribal law enforcement partners and brings together national security, counterterrorism, counterintelligence, and foreign intelligence surveillance operations under a single authority.

Thomas Jefferson wrote, "The most sacred of the duties of government [is] to do equal and impartial justice to all its citizens." This sacred duty to fulfill the promise of justice for all remains the guiding ideal for the men and women of the Department in carrying out their mission:

"To enforce the law and defend the interests of the United States according to the law; to ensure public safety against threats foreign and domestic; to provide federal leadership in preventing and controlling crime; to seek just punishment for those guilty of unlawful behavior; and to ensure fair and impartial administration of justice for all Americans."

Statutory Authority: The Judiciary Act of 1789, ch. 20, sec. 35, 1 Stat. 73, 92-93 (1789) created the Office of the Attorney General. In 1870, after the post-Civil War increase in the amount of litigation involving the United States necessitated the very expensive retention of a large number of private attorneys to handle the workload, a concerned Congress passed the Act to Establish the Department of Justice, ch. 150, 16 Stat. 162 (1870) setting it up as "an executive department of the government of the United States" with the Attorney General as its head. The Act gave DOJ control over all criminal prosecutions and civil suits in which the United States had an interest. In addition, the Act gave the Attorney General and the Department control over federal law enforcement, establishing the Attorney General as the chief law enforcement officer of the Federal Government. Finally, to assist the Attorney General, the Act created the Office of the Solicitor General.

The Act is the foundation upon which DOJ still rests. However, the structure of the Department has changed and expanded over the years, with the addition of the Deputy Attorney General and the Associate Attorney General, as well as the formation of the components. Unchanged is the steadily increasing workload of the Department. It has become the world's largest law office and the central agency for enforcement of federal laws.