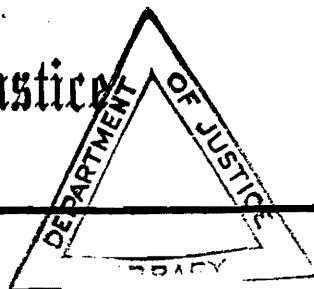




Department of Justice



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FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY

ADDRESS

BY

HONORABLE ROBERT F. KENNEDY

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES

Prepared for Delivery

at the

NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

CONFERENCE ON UNEMPLOYED, OUT OF SCHOOL

YOUTH IN URBAN AREAS

Statler-Hilton Hotel

Washington, D. C.

Wednesday, May 24, 1961

1:00 P. M.

Many people have asked me what connection the Department of Justice has with a conference on unemployment concerning out of school youths in urban areas. You may be wondering, too. The reason is this:

Today, the Department of Justice, through the Bureau of Prisons, is providing institutional care and treatment for more than 5,000 juvenile and youthful offenders. In fact, the Bureau of Prisons is now devoting nine of its 31 institutions to the ever increasing number of young men, 22 and under, who are being turned over to us from the federal courts.

And the connection between these young men and your discussions are very relevant because the majority prior to their apprehension were out of school and out of work.

In a recent special study of 350 of these men, only 2 could be regarded as skilled workers and only 54 as semi-skilled. Almost without exception the study showed that these young men failed in school. Despite the fact that most claimed to have an eighth grade education, 35% were found to be functionally illiterate.

Contrary to some opinion, these young men in the main had not failed in school because of their lack of learning ability. The intelligence levels of most of them were within the normal range. These youths are typical of the school drop-outs about whom we are concerned. Most were problem cases from their early school years. They were truant more often than other students. Their parents were not concerned about their academic achievements and many of them moved from school to school without ever making a satisfactory adjustment.

We are doing everything we can to prepare these young people for the labor market upon their release. We are seeking new methods to make the transition from prison to community life more effective. Even so, it is becoming more and more evident that even substantially increasing the effectiveness of our control and treatment efforts would not solve the problem.

For example, some 70% of all the prisoners in our custody have been committed previously. It is essential that we continue to take all possible steps to enforce the law vigorously and that we keep hardened prisoners from contaminating other young people. We recognize also that many young offenders may be redirected toward constructive activities through successful treatment efforts. However, these programs deal with the end results of delinquency -- not the sources. We must broaden our attack and focus as much energy in the future on prevention as we have on control and treatment in the past. We must find ways to prevent spending more money for more institutions for more juveniles. And, unless something is done, this is what will happen. I cannot believe we will allow ourselves to meet this challenge in this way.

The effects of wide-spread changes in the social and economic life of our society has had a tremendous impact on the unskilled and poorly trained youth living in the slum areas of our large cities. These are the young people who now contribute most to the growing ranks of juvenile

delinquency and youth crime and ultimately to adult criminal careers.

Where aspirations outstrip opportunities, law-abiding society becomes the victim. Attitudes of contempt toward the law are forged in this crucible and form the inner core of the beliefs of organized adult crime.

To cope with these sources of criminality requires a broad concentrated effort to narrow the gap between the legitimate aspirations of our deprived youths and the opportunities available to them. It means motivating and creating access to resources which will provide them opportunities to prepare for and pursue productive law-abiding careers.

Such a task exceeds the unaided capacities of individual families or even local communities. It requires a coordinated approach between different levels of government. The problem of delinquency today, we believe, is a problem of employment and education opportunities for preparation and achievement, as well as a problem of moral discipline and control. The failure to motivate and train all of our youths contributes to the growing problem of delinquency.

We cannot afford to ignore these signs of trouble. We cannot afford to ignore the rising social and economic costs. Instead, we must deal with the sources of the problem. To help accomplish this objective, the President has given the responsibility of developing Federal leadership to assist the states and local communities to reduce delinquency to a committee composed of Mr. Ribicoff and Mr. Goldberg and myself.

The efforts of the Justice Department to handle its responsibility cannot be isolated from your programs for helping all youths, and we are, therefore, most interested in the successful outcome and followup of this conference.

The efforts of law enforcement and treatment agencies must be developed as a vital part of a large scale preventive effort to channel the enterprise of our youths in all sectors of our society into equally useful and constructive activities.

And this, with your help, we must do.