

REMARKS  
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

OF

THE HONORABLE KAROL V. MASON  
ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL  
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

AT THE

BUILDING NEIGHBORHOOD CAPACITY PROGRAM  
LEARNING SESSION

ON

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WASHINGTON, DC

Good morning. It's great to see everyone. My name is Karol Mason, and I'm the Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs. I'm pleased to be here today and delighted to welcome all of you to what I know will be a dynamic conversation about what we're learning through the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program and other place-based efforts.

I'm very happy to be joined by Luke Tate, Special Assistant to the President, whom I'll have the pleasure of introducing shortly. I'm also glad to welcome our esteemed colleagues from the Departments of Education, Housing and Urban Development, and Health and Human Services, all partners in the BNCP Federal Management Team. And thank you, as well, to our friends at the Center for the Study of Social Policy, who've been leading our technical assistance efforts from the beginning. It's great to have you all here.

And I want to recognize the folks who spearhead our BNCP efforts in our Bureau of Justice Assistance, especially Priya Sarathy-Jones and Alissa Huntoon. This is such a critical program for us in the Department of Justice, and we're fortunate to have talented and committed people like Priya and Alissa heading up our work.

Priya and the members of the Federal Management Team have brought us here today for what I know will be a lively discussion about neighborhood revitalization and what we can do to ensure that our investments in distressed communities yield significant and positive change.

The whole idea behind the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program is to drive change in neighborhoods that have faced historic barriers to revitalization. In order to do that well, we've got to bring together all stakeholders – residents, community-based organizations, city-level officials – and work across long-standing divides.

We know that overcoming barriers of turf and trust is essential to building strong, safe, and vibrant neighborhoods. We've seen over the last year in communities across the country – in places like Ferguson and Baltimore – just how important and difficult this work is. But building trust is more than strengthening relationships between citizens and the police. It's broader than that. It's about equity and mutual respect across the system, and throughout the community. And it's about creating opportunities where they didn't exist before.

Opportunity shouldn't be conditioned by where a person lives. That's why the President launched his *My Brother's Keeper* initiative – to make sure everyone who's willing to work hard, regardless of where they come from, has a chance to succeed. This is the philosophy behind the Building Neighborhood Capacity Program.

We launched BNCP three years ago – in partnership with HUD and the Department of Education – as a way of directing investments to neighborhoods where residents experience profound and persistent disparities in public safety, education, housing, health, employment, and other areas. In these communities, the challenges are

often deeper than crime, or health and educational deficits, or unavailable jobs and housing – they lay in a fundamental lack of capacity. Some of these communities don't even have the resources to write a grant proposal.

So we selected eight neighborhoods in four cities to focus our efforts – Flint, Fresno, Memphis, and Milwaukee. Over two years, the sites have engaged in action-learning projects and a revitalization planning process aimed at building capacity. We expanded the program last year by giving each city two years of additional support to expand to a third neighborhood. Each of the sites is working to bring in all stakeholders – residents and community organizations, civic leaders, policymakers, funders, and cross-sector partners in the city, region, and beyond.

As you can see by the White House's presence here, this program is a major element of the Administration's place-based efforts. It fits squarely into the Neighborhood Revitalization and Promise Zones initiatives, which partner communities and the federal government to help create jobs, leverage private investment, increase economic activity, expand educational opportunities, and reduce violent crime. BNCP is helping us to move the ball forward.

Today, we're going to hear what it takes to cultivate relationships and build partnerships in communities of distress. We have several experts – both from the national level and those who do this work every day in the field – and they're going to talk a little about their experience and give us their insights.

Our goal is to have plenty of time for dialogue on how we can leverage our collective knowledge and resources to sustain programs like BNCP. The idea is for everyone to come away with practical ideas on how to advance the good work you're already doing in your communities.

And that work is critical. There are so many neighborhoods full of positive potential, and so many people in those neighborhoods trying to make a difference but who are burdened by the disorder and distress all around them. We can help remove the obstacles in their path, and we can help make their communities places of opportunity. And we can do it together.

To get us started, we're very fortunate to have our friend from the White House Domestic Policy Council, Luke Tate. As a special assistant to the President, Luke is one of the Administration's leaders in promoting urban growth and economic opportunity. He's been with BNCP from the beginning, going back to his days at HUD, where he made sure we were keeping our focus on neighborhoods with serious challenges. He's been a terrific ally, and he truly understands just how important your work is.

After Luke speaks, we'll hear from Eric Robertson, the President of Community LIFT, the BNCP lead agency in Memphis. Then we'll have the pleasure of hearing from two leaders in the community change field: Sandra Moore, President of Urban Strategies, and Bob Giloth, Vice President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Finally, Akilah Butler, head of the BNCP Technical Assistance Team from the Center for the Study of Social Policy, will facilitate a question-and-answer session.

So now I'll turn it over to our good friend, Luke Tate.

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