

REMARKS

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

OF

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

AT THE

2015 VOCA NATIONAL TRAINING CONFERENCE

ON

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WASHINGTON, DC

Thank you, Marilyn. I'm very happy to be here, and delighted to welcome everyone to Washington. I want to echo Marilyn's words and tell all of you just how much we value your partnership, across the Office of Justice Programs. The work of victim assistance and compensation is vital to the mission of OJP and central to our goal of a more fair and more effective system of justice.

I'd like to thank Leslie O'Reilly and Cletus Nnanabu for their leadership of the National Association of VOCA Assistance Administrators and the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards. They and their organizations are long-time partners in our work to serve crime victims across the country. And a special thanks to Steve Derene and Dan Eddy for their outstanding work over the years representing the interests and concerns of state VOCA administrators and crime victims.

And of course, thanks to Joye, Marilyn, and the terrific staff of our Office for Victims of Crime. Their commitment to America's crime victims is second to none.

For reasons that don't need to be explained to anyone here, this is a heady time for victim services. As Marilyn noted, the Crime Victims Fund got a boost this year. Thanks to this year's appropriations bill, the amount available under the Fund more than tripled. The most direct effect, as you know, is on those of you who administer state victim assistance funding. On the whole, you will be receiving four times the amount of VOCA dollars you received last year.

This is an exciting prospect for programs that, for years, have labored on shoestring budgets and bare-bones staffing. But it's also a daunting prospect, especially for those of you in charge of managing these funds. It's going to mean a greater oversight and monitoring role. It could mean significantly more compensation claims, based on more active referrals from victim assistance programs.

And it will mean greater accountability. Congress designated part of the increase in the Crime Victims Fund to go to the Justice Department's Office of Inspector General for enhanced auditing and oversight related to increases in the amount of funds and the number of grant recipients. And this is a good thing. As stewards of this very important funding stream, I think we should welcome the attention our programs are getting. I believe there will be more on this from our OIG colleagues in one of tomorrow's workshops.

So the new funding presents a great opportunity – no question – but it also means greater scrutiny and some additional challenges. And we need to be prepared to meet these challenges.

This influx comes at a time when the victims field is really just beginning to focus in earnest on building capacity. Victim services have come a long way since the early years, when they were just a sidelight in the justice system. But we're still a long way from where we need to be. The fact is, not all victims have access to services.

The latest figures from our Bureau of Justice Statistics, covering through 2013, show that only 14 percent of victims of serious violent crime reported having received services. And that percentage had not changed materially in about 20 years! For all the great work that victim advocates have done raising awareness of victims' needs and promoting victims' rights, there are still way too many crime victims who don't get the help they need.

This, of course, has a great deal to do with a lack of sufficient resources – and I think it's unrealistic to think that even a major increase like the one we're seeing this year will enable us to reach every single victim. But the funding we've been given should help us to make significant inroads in enhancing our collective capacity.

Still, funding alone won't make the difference. What will is smart and strategic planning – finding ways to expand access while maintaining quality and relying on data and research to guide decision-making. These objectives are at the heart of Vision 21, which Joye and her staff – and so many of you – have worked hard to institutionalize.

We're already making progress. In the area of data and research, our Bureau of Justice Statistics is nearing the launch of a National Survey of Victim Service Providers, which will be the first-ever national effort to capture detailed information on the number, characteristics, and capacity of victim serving organizations in the United States. An enhanced National Crime Victimization Survey will, for the first time, gather detailed information on victim use and satisfaction with the services they received, as well as information about why many victims don't receive services. And a separate BJS project – the National Crime Statistics Exchange – will generate detailed national estimates of the volume and characteristics of crimes known to law enforcement and deliver that information to law enforcement officials, policymakers, and criminal justice and victim service professionals.

Meanwhile, our National Institute of Justice has a large and growing portfolio of victim-related research, covering violent victimization, victim-offender overlap, and human trafficking crimes, among other topics. You'll hear more about that in a workshop tomorrow.

In the area of expanded services, we're reaching out to underserved populations like boys and young men of color, who are disproportionately caught in a cycle of victimization and criminality. Reducing victimization among young people, particularly in minority communities, is one of the chief goals of the President's *My Brother's Keeper* Initiative. OVC has been very much part of our work under that effort.

As part of our Violence Reduction Network, which is marshaling resources from across the Department of Justice in some of America's most crime-ridden neighborhoods, OVC's Training and Technical Assistance Center is working to assess where services are needed so that we can identify where VOCA funds can make a difference.

And we're continuing our outreach in Indian country. The Oklahoma Tribal Liaison Demonstration Program, which OVC funded last year, has increased communication with the state's 38 federally recognized tribes and brought greater awareness of victim compensation resources – and I'm very pleased that the Oklahoma Secretary of State has now hired the liaison as a Deputy Assistant specifically assigned to Native American affairs.

But we know that success in building our nation's victim services capacity depends, not on federal programs, but on leadership at the state level. That's why I want all of you to know that OJP and OVC are committed to helping you make the most of your resources. I know that Joye, Marilyn, and OVC staff are communicating regularly with you and have made a concerted effort to keep you apprised of legislative, policy, and program developments. And the OVC Training and Technical Assistance Center now has a staff member dedicated to each state to help you meet your training and assistance needs.

You should also know that one of our top priorities is the new VOCA Victim Assistance Rule, which will clarify allowable costs and result in greater flexibility in how you allocate your resources. You'll hear more about that in a workshop later this morning, but suffice it to say, we are just as anxious as you for the rule to hit the streets so that you can have it as a tool to plan for the coming year.

Rest assured, you won't be facing these new challenges alone. All of us at OJP – and certainly everyone in OVC – want to make this work. And we will make it work.

This is a tremendous opportunity to make a difference – to widen our nation's victim-serving capacity and to bring help to so many people who need it. You are the right people for the job. You have the knowledge, the experience, and – most of all – the commitment we need.

I'm excited about what lies ahead, because I know it's only a matter of time before we're reaching substantially greater numbers of victims and bringing justice and healing to families and communities across the country.

Thank you all for giving me your time, and for all that you do on behalf of crime victims.

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