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Aug. 9, '99 Letter from Janet Reno

B. Reed / Gene S.

Need to decide how
to respond - she has
some good ideas

Advise

BC

Copied

Reed

Aperling

Podesta

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN
8-30-99



Office of the Attorney General
Washington, D. C. 20530

August 9, 1999

Blood/Guns
Used to decide how
to respond - see list
some govt ideas
Alvin — BS

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

America is only as healthy as its communities, and our communities are at a crossroads. As the year 2000 draws near, we face a new century with an opportunity to demonstrate significant reductions in crime and improve outcomes for children, families and communities. This moment in time provides a unique occasion for the Federal government in partnership with State and local jurisdictions to make a concerted commitment to the effective practices we know can result in safer streets, stronger communities, and healthy, law-abiding children and families.

Under your leadership, this Administration has developed and implemented several significant efforts, including Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities, the Livable Communities Agenda, and the New Markets Initiative. At the Justice Department, we have had considerable success with Weed & Seed and our Comprehensive Strategies program, to name but a few. We have established various partnerships with the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, EPA and HUD, and worked in coordination with other agencies, as well.

There is more progress to be made. It cannot be done by Departments working alone. While partnerships to date between two and, more rarely, three agencies have improved our effectiveness, broader efforts will increase our success exponentially.

Broader efforts require not only your leadership and support, but the ongoing, active involvement of the White House. To best accomplish the objectives described below, the Domestic Policy Council should serve the coordinating function. Housing these proposed initiatives in the White House will both raise their profile and indicate to communities that they are receiving this Administration's highest level of commitment.

I would very much like to work with you in two specific areas that I believe are critical to the health of our communities and the well-being of all Americans. In the area of healthy building blocks for child development, I believe we have

made great strides, and I am recommending several additional steps we might take to institutionalize our approach. A second, very compelling area that is less well developed pertains to the reentry into society of persons completing prison terms, a large number of whom are between the ages of 18 and 35. Our handling of this issue will have tremendous impact on public safety and the criminal justice system in the next century. I urge you to consider the following proposals:

Safe Schools/Healthy Children/Strong Communities

Since 1992, this Administration has learned an extraordinary amount about how the federal government can best assist communities, families, and children. Building on decades of prior experience in federal support for communities, we have finally learned critical lessons about how best to provide to communities the tools they need to support safe, healthy, and prosperous citizens. I believe there are six pillars, or building blocks of a safe and healthy community for children:

- 1) strengthening parents;
- 2) ensuring adequate health care;
- 3) improving education and job preparation;
- 4) getting adults more involved in the lives of kids;
- 5) safeguarding children's environments; and
- 6) providing public safety.

During the last year we have taken a major step toward funding comprehensive community-building strategies by bringing together the resources of three agencies to combat youth violence. The FY99 **Safe Schools/Healthy Students (SS/HS)** program will provide 50 communities with \$380 million over three years to execute comprehensive safe school strategies. The strategies must include partnerships between the school district, local law enforcement, and the local mental health authorities. Collaboration is also required with community-based organizations, parents and others. For the purpose of this program, a comprehensive strategy must include the following six elements:

- 1) a secure school environment;
- 2) prevention and early intervention;
- 3) mental health assessment and services;
- 4) early childhood development;
- 5) education reform; and
- 6) safe school policies.

This first-ever effort to channel support from three Cabinet agencies into one funding stream has received a strong response: more than 470 applications were received, of which 340 passed the

first two levels of review. The grants are scheduled to be awarded at the end of August, and I hope you will join the Departments in making the announcement.

Grant Expansion

We can build on the initial success of this effort. I propose that we expand this grant to encompass, even more comprehensively, elements that create safe and healthy growing environments for children. The next three areas for expansion that seem most logical are **job preparation** (Department of Labor), **nutrition** (USDA) and **physical health** (HHS). There are a number of ways to accomplish this, but I would recommend one of the following alternatives:

- (1) Create a second round of 50 grants that would engage all five agencies (with an added contribution from HHS on the physical health side). This would require an additional expenditure of \$400 - \$450 million over three years. By doing this, we would meet the obvious need and interest of a larger number of communities, but the expense is significant. Currently, the agency contributions for year one of SS/HS are: DOJ: \$95 million (\$15 million from OJJDP and \$80 million from COPS); DOE: \$60 million from the Safe and Drug Free Schools Program; and HHS: \$25 million from the Center for Mental Health Services. Additional agency contributions should be no less than \$15-20 million per year to make their participation worthwhile.
- (2) A less costly alternative would be to hold a limited competition among the successful FY99 applicants to broaden their grants for the second and third years in the areas described above. This would have the benefit of reaching communities that we have already determined to be most prepared to plan comprehensively and execute those plans, and deepening our impact in those communities.

There may be other agencies, such as HUD or Transportation, that can contribute in relevant program areas. The Treasury Secretary has also expressed his interest in the project to me.

Federal Healthy Parenting Collaborative

Our interagency collaboration should not end with joint grant making. Our work in early childhood development has led us to understand the importance of, and the need to, equip parents, particularly parents of children who experience significant risk factors, with the knowledge and skills to raise their children in a safe and healthy environment. Secretary Riley has frequently said that the most important element in preventing youth from

becoming violent is the presence of a warm, caring adult with whom the youth has a strong, individual connection. Most experts believe that the best connections are between children and their parents.

A number of Cabinet-level agencies make significant investments in programs targeted at parents. Some of these programs are directly focused on healthy parenting and some are aimed at the target population but have a different focus (e.g., Welfare-to-work, WIC, etc.). Several months ago, my staff met with staff from the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services to get an overview of their primary programs in this area. They found many possible areas for knowledge sharing, cooperation and collaboration. However, there is little or no current coordination on this issue among the relevant agencies, although we do work together on related issues such as neglected and abused children and children exposed to violence.

I propose that you create a Federal Healthy Parenting Collaborative. Senior officials at the Departments of Justice, Education, HHS, HUD, Labor, Agriculture, Interior, Defense and others would participate in a working group with the goal of coordinating and enhancing our efforts within the government and with the private, foundation, and non-profit sectors. Information and knowledge sharing would enable the agencies to enhance and cross-fertilize our programs. A Department of Education parenting effort that is housed in their adult literacy program could provide us with materials for work that the Department of Justice does in prisons and vice versa. Several agencies have fatherhood initiatives that are not currently coordinated. Without a formal mechanism for sharing information government-wide, we will miss out on important opportunities.

After sharing information and knowledge among ourselves, the Collaborative would collectively engage in outreach with experts in academia, the private sector, state and local government, the foundation world and the non-profit sector, culminating in a "White House Conference on Healthy Parenting in the 21st Century" that you would host in early 2000. The Conference would be the occasion to set a national agenda with goals and commitments by all the relevant players. The Healthy Parenting Collaborative would be an effective vehicle for federal government cooperation with the non-profit organization you announced at the May 10 summit meeting following the Columbine tragedy and for various other initiatives such as the Ad Council/Kaiser Foundation "Talk to your Kids" campaign.

Everywhere I travel, people ask for easier, more convenient access to information about grants and programs of the Federal government. The information available from each agency is balkanized, but the concerns and interests of the public are not isolated by agency. An important component of this Safe Schools/Healthy Students/Strong Communities Initiative should be to provide centralized, seamless information about available programs and ongoing activities.

Over the past 18 months, the Justice Department has developed a page on our web site called, "Building Blocks for Safe and Healthy Communities." This page contains information about all of our programs and grants, divided by topic. The five primary topics are employment, health, shelter, education and public safety. Each topic is further divided, depending on the developmental stage of life covered by the program: infancy to preschool, K-12, or post-high school. This enables every user to quickly identify what they are interested in by subject area and age level.

I would like to see every Cabinet-level agency organize information about its programs in a similar format. One entity should then have the responsibility to package all of this information and make it available over the Internet.

This might have been impossible to do before the Internet, but as more and more people have access to the Web, it becomes inexcusable not to harness the technology to put government at their fingertips. I know there are costs involved in this project, but I do not think they would be too significant if every agency absorbed their share. My staff has already had some promising discussions about this with other agencies and OMB.

Reentry

We have spent considerable time in this country focusing on increasing prison bed space, and little time making community corrections viable and effective. Various sentencing reforms have propelled prison populations from 320,000 inmates in 1980 to roughly 1.2 million in 1998. The costs of confinement in the same period rose from about \$5 billion to \$22 billion (1996). At the same time, we now have approximately 3.9 million men and women on probation and parole in this country. That is almost 4 times as many offenders out in the community as there are in prison.

Public debate has been focused on record prison growth, but the obvious consequence -- record prison releases -- has been almost entirely ignored. Some 500,000 inmates will leave prison this year. They will return mainly to urban areas and will

return in disproportionate numbers to certain urban neighborhoods. For example, exploratory work conducted at the National Institute of Justice found that 80 percent of the inmates returning to Baltimore last year returned to 5 percent of the city's zip codes. We have not done a lot to get either the offenders or our communities ready for this. To protect our communities and continue the reduction in crime, we need to do more.

We must confront the potential danger that returning inmates present to communities. One quarter of the entire paroled population, some 173,000 parolees, returned to state prisons in 1997. Previous studies by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that some 65 percent of all inmates will be returned to custody within 3 years of release. These returns are a significant drain on state resources: states now admit one revocation to prison with every two new commitments. Thus, while the primary concern is public safety, the primary solution is not likely to be increased parole revocation.

The volume of returning inmates introduces new social phenomena that must be considered:

- ▶ In areas of concentrated reentry, inmates pose not just individual safety concerns but community safety threats;
- ▶ Abolition of parole in many states and reductions in other state community release program resources exacerbate the social adjustment task for individuals and communities alike; and
- ▶ The basic demographics of prison populations - males aged 18 to 35 - offers American industry the single largest untapped labor pool in the domestic economy.

We need to reorient our approach to this segment of the community, the 18-35 year old, who has gotten on the wrong side of the criminal justice system, or who is at-risk of doing so. We cannot become a society that treats these individuals only as threats to be contained, and not as resources to be nurtured. Community corrections and supervision programs that include drug testing, drug treatment and other transitional services, such as job training and placement assistance, are critical to restoring hope to the individuals involved, and to minority communities decimated by the high percentage of men in prison, on probation or on parole.

Our strategies must simultaneously keep communities safe; minimize returns to prison; and maximize contributions to state and local economies. Policy makers must devise strategies that balance surveillance and sanctions against long term human

resource investments. We must transform this danger into opportunity.

We have been considering two basic strategies: Reentry Courts and Reentry Partnerships. Reentry courts build from the drug court concept of judicial supervision in order to improve the offender's long-term behavior. Judges would assume oversight of parole and other conditional release functions in order to monitor performance and channel human resources. Reentry partnerships build from police/corrections partnerships. Institutional and community corrections agencies would team with local police and urban services to monitor offenders in the community but also target job, housing, family support, and counseling resources. The Department of Justice is continuing to develop both of these concepts.

While the Department of Justice has expertise in sanctions, it needs the support of other Federal agencies to help develop the human resources components of these programs. We have identified a number of agencies as potential partners in reentry programs:

- ▶ HUD (reentry and long-term housing);
- ▶ HHS (welfare assistance eligibility to provide transitional income), Administration on Children and Families (support for absentee fathers -- a third of all inmates have children), SAMSHA (CMHS for mental health and CSAT for drug treatment services);
- ▶ DOL (jobs and training programs);
- ▶ USDA Food and Nutrition Service (food stamp; WIC); and
- ▶ ED (adult literacy; training programs).

I propose that you issue a directive creating a new working group composed of these agencies. The purpose of this working group would be to develop an integrated team approach to dealing with these issues, create opportunities for communities to develop their own comprehensive strategies and remove any existing unnecessary barriers. I am willing to spend whatever time necessary and work closely with the DPC.

Over the next year, I hope that we can both use the bully pulpit to create a public discussion of these issues.

The magnitude of the reentry problem is a very recent discovery. No one yet has a firm grasp on what to do or how to do it. What has surprised officials so far is the diversity of audiences that resonate with the issue and the willingness of

The President

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state and local agencies to participate in experiments even though no promises of financial aid have been made. Perhaps policy makers see returning offenders as an identifiable safety threat. Possibly officials see chances to integrate human resources in new and more effective ways. I believe we can have a significant impact on this issue during the next fifteen months.

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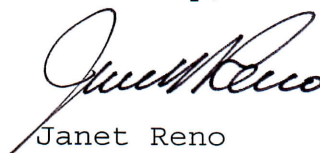
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I realize these proposals are ambitious. But I believe we owe the American people nothing less. I hope you will seriously consider implementing some or all of these projects. If you choose to do so, I pledge to do everything within my power to make them a success.

I look forward to talking with you further about these ideas and any other relevant proposals that you might be entertaining. Thank you for your consideration and for your leadership in this important area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Janet Reno".

Janet Reno