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CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP FOR AMERICA'S YOUNG PEOPLE

April 28, 2016

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By Secretary of Education John B. King, Jr. and Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs Karol V. Mason

When President Obama launched his *My Brother's Keeper* initiative two years ago, he said, “[w]e need to give every child, no matter what they look like, where they live, the chance to reach their full potential. Because if we do. . . then not only will they contribute to the growth and prosperity of this country, but they will pass on those lessons to their children and to their grandchildren. . . And this country will be richer and stronger for it for generations to come.”

The President believes, and we believe, that all young people deserve the chance to participate fully in the American dream. But there are too many young people who feel cut off from that opportunity, whether it's because they lack support networks, live in impoverished communities, go to under-resourced schools, or have a parent in prison or jail.

Earlier this week, to kick off the first National Reentry Week, we had the privilege of sitting down with an impressive group of high school and college students whose parents are incarcerated in federal prisons. At Benjamin Banneker High School, they spoke eloquently, and with insight beyond their years, of the obstacles they encounter and the burdens they bear. One young woman, a senior, reminded us that “time doesn't stop when a parent is incarcerated.” As she and others explained, children of incarcerated parents are deprived of a fundamental human need – the nurturing presence of a caring adult – yet they are still expected to carry on and find their way.

We also heard from educators and supportive community members, like the U.S. Dream Academy and Mission: Launch, about steps school systems and the federal government can take to help these young people get on track to academic success and productive citizenship. Their ideas ranged from the principled – understanding the perspectives of these youth and serving as an anchor – to the practical – creating safe spaces that allow students to talk about their circumstances and using technology to keep kids connected to their parents.

We know that more than 2.7 million children in this country have parents behind bars. And one in five youth in custody has or is expecting children. These young parents in particular need support if they are to meet their familial and civic responsibilities. Under the Second Chance Act, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, a component of the Justice Department's Office of Justice Programs, last year awarded more than \$1.2 million to expand services to children who have parents incarcerated in federal prison and an additional \$3 million in mentoring grants to strengthen relationships between young fathers and their children.

One of the keys to success for any child is a solid education. Many young people, especially those who have come into contact with the justice system, struggle to find access to quality educational opportunities, and many others have academic achievement foreclosed by harsh disciplinary policies that remove students from school for minor infractions. A Department of Education-Department of Justice partnership called the Supportive School Discipline Initiative has provided guidance to school districts on reforming these zero-disciplinary policies so that kids remain in school and out of the justice system.

We are also helping to restore educational access to those who have already come into contact with the system. One avenue, the federal Pell Grant program, has long been denied to individuals held in federal or state correctional institutions. In December 2014, we issued a guidance package to state school officers and state attorneys general explaining that juvenile facilities are excluded from this category, so students in those facilities are in fact eligible for Pell Grant funding. We went even further last summer when we announced Second Chance Pell, an experimental initiative that provides a limited waiver of the statutory ban on Pell Grant eligibility for those in federal and state institutions.

And this week, through a new Education-Justice partnership, we are making new resources available to support educational opportunities for justice-involved youth. Research suggests that career and technical education may reduce recidivism and improve employability. Under our Juvenile Justice Reentry Education Program, three school districts and a community college will receive grants to provide pre- and post-release career and technical education and employment and training opportunities aimed at helping young people returning from juvenile justice facilities.

Giving our young people a chance to rise to their full potential is one of our most important responsibilities – as educators, as justice system professionals, and as citizens. Through *My Brother's Keeper* and the reentry activities we are supporting across the federal government, the Obama Administration and its many local and private partners are working together to make sure that opportunity remains available to all our nation's youth.

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Office of Justice Programs (OJP)

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Return on a Chance

January 15, 2016

Courtesy of Daryl Atkinson, Department of Justice Second Chance Fellow Yesterday I had the privilege of accompanying Attorney General Loretta Lynch to Boston, MA to visit three outstanding reentry programs – the Common Ground Institute (CGI), the Boston Reentry Initiative (BRI), and Community Reentry for Women (C.R.E.W.). To say the trip was surreal would be an understatement because it occurred in the second week of my new role as the U.S. Department of Justice's first Second Chance Fellow, and 16 years ago I was beginning my own reentry journey after being released from prison. President Obama recently said, "America is a nation of second chances." For me, yesterday's trip to Boston was the complete validation of that principle.

Responsible Fathers, Healthy Communities

December 16, 2009

Today, the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and Attorney General Eric Holder co-hosted a Fatherhood Town Hall at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. The purpose of the town hall was to discuss the importance of fatherhood and how the criminal justice system can help support the successful reentry of fathers back into the community. The Attorney General discussed what the research has shown regarding the effects of incarceration on children: More than 1.5...

Celebrating National Mentoring Month and Applauding Our Mentors Around the Country

January 29, 2016

Courtesy of Robert L. Listenbee, Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Every child deserves the opportunity to grow up with the guidance and support of a caring adult. January marks the 14th annual National Mentoring Month, a nationwide campaign that aims to recruit mentors and focus national attention on the importance of those working together to ensure positive outcomes for youth. This is a great time to discuss why mentoring programs are critical to the success of our youth and how OJJDP is supporting these programs around the country.

National Reentry Week: An Essential Part of Our Mission

March 21, 2016

Courtesy of Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch

Under the Obama Administration, the Department of Justice has taken major steps to make our criminal justice system more fair, more efficient, and more effective at reducing recidivism and helping formerly incarcerated individuals contribute to their communities. An important part of that task is preparing those who have paid their debt to society for substantive opportunities beyond the prison gates, and addressing obstacles to successful reentry that too many returning citizens encounter.

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