

REMARKS
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

OF

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AT THE

2016 NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON SEX OFFENDER MANAGEMENT
AND ACCOUNTABILITY

ON

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KANSAS CITY, MO

Thank you, Lou [deBaca]. I'm delighted to be here in Kansas City, and I'm glad to join you and your team in welcoming everyone to this symposium. It's great to see so many dedicated professionals gathered here from across the country willing to come together on behalf of the safety of our citizens and communities.

We're here today and tomorrow to mark the tremendous progress we've made in the 10 years since the passage of the Adam Walsh Act. This is, in many ways, a celebratory occasion. But across the country, our dedicated law enforcement professionals – so many of whom are represented here today – are feeling anything but celebratory.

We've been reminded of the grave risks they face and the serious threats they encounter every day. At the Office of Justice Programs, we are heartbroken by the deaths of the eight officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge, and I think it's appropriate that we take time here today to show our sympathy and solidarity with their families, colleagues, and loved ones. I'd like to take a moment now, if we could, to honor them with a minute of silence.

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As we meet over these two days to discuss the dangers posed to our communities, I hope everyone will remember these fallen officers and the peril faced by all of America's law enforcement professionals every day. Please show them your support and gratitude for all they do to keep us safe.

I want to thank Lou and his staff for the terrific work they've done to bring us together to talk about both the successes we've achieved over the last decade and the challenges that still lie before us. You'd be hard-pressed to find an organization that has worked harder to fulfill its mission than the SMART Office. They've done a remarkable job balancing the demands of their congressional mandate with the needs and concerns of the jurisdictions they're charged with helping. I think they deserve a round of applause for rising to the occasion.

I also want to acknowledge our partners who are joining us today. Thank you, first of all, to Tammy Dickinson, the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, and David Harlow, Deputy Director of the U.S. Marshals Service. I want to thank Colonel Johnson, Superintendent of the Missouri State Highway Patrol, for helping to welcome us to his state. And I'm very glad to be here with our friends from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children – its President and CEO, John Clark, and Callahan Walsh, who serves as a specialist at the Center.

We're also fortunate to have partners from the other side of the world with us today. The United States is not alone in this fight – other countries have formed registries as well – and we look forward to coordinating with them as we implement the provisions of International Megan's Law, which President Obama signed earlier this year. One leading country in this effort is South Korea, and we're happy to welcome

their delegation to this symposium. I hope you all have a chance to meet and compare notes with them.

Finally, I want to thank the 650 law enforcement and probation officers and SORNA registry personnel who've joined us from across the country – and for all you're doing to protect our communities.

It was 35 years ago tomorrow that a six-year-old boy named Adam Walsh was taken – literally taken – from his family. Adam's murder still defies any sense of moral logic – his death remains as unspeakable today as it was in 1981. Yet his family, and concerned citizens across the country, were determined to see that something good came of that tragedy.

Thanks to the powerful advocacy of Adam's father and mother – John and Reve Walsh – and to the dedicated work of a number of other champions, a terrific organization came into existence: the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. The Office of Justice Programs has been a strong supporter of NCMEC since the Center's inception and proud partners in its work to find and protect missing, abducted, and exploited children.

Adam left another positive legacy when former President George W. Bush signed into law – 10 years ago and 25 years after Adam's abduction – the federal bill that bears his name. The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act did several important things. It established baseline standards for sex offender registration and notification systems. It expanded the range of offenses registration and notification systems must address. It included tribes along with states and territories as jurisdictions responsible for managing sex offenders. And one of the most important things it did, in my view, was that it created the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking – known by its much simpler, and apt, acronym, SMART.

The SMART Office is the first and only federal office devoted solely to managing sex offenders. Over the years, they've provided guidance, training, and technical assistance to dozens of states and territories, scores of tribes, and many other organizations on their responsibilities under the Adam Walsh Act, particularly the provisions of the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act, or SORNA.

This hasn't always been an easy job. Jurisdictions are in very different places in their compliance efforts, and the SMART Office is tasked with not only making their compliance responsibilities clear, but helping them meet those responsibilities. In light of the challenges, they've done a fantastic job.

Let me tell you, specifically, what they've been able to accomplish:

Twenty states and territories have substantially implemented the provisions of the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act. Those that haven't have made

considerable progress and, I'm confident, are on their way to crossing the threshold of substantial implementation.

The SMART Office has created a SORNA Exchange Portal that improves information sharing among jurisdictions and closes registration loopholes when registrants relocate.

One hundred tribal jurisdictions have substantially implemented SORNA, and more are expected to do so soon.

Because tribes are such critical partners, the SMART Office has worked hard to meet the unique challenges they face. The Tribal Access Program gives tribes access to national crime information databases and makes it easier for them to exchange data. The SMART Office launched a Native American Sex Offender Management project to identify evidence-based practices for the treatment, management, and reentry of Native Americans who've committed sex offenses. And the Tribe and Territory Sex Offender Registry System offers a SORNA-compliant administrative registry system and a public sex offender registry website free of charge.

Those are just a few of the SMART Office's impressive achievements.

But they haven't been content with fulfilling their legislative mandates. They're also looking to improve our knowledge about what works in sex offender management.

One of their biggest efforts – and this is something I'm very proud of – is something called the Sex Offender Management Assessment and Planning Initiative. This has been a major undertaking to assess the state of research and practice in the field. The SMART Office has produced a thorough literature review on adults and juveniles who commit sex offenses. They've consulted with practitioners to find out what programs and practices are effective or promising. And they've identified the challenges faced by the different disciplines involved in sex offender management.

The SMART Office is already using this information to support innovation through the development of treatment standards and assessment and progress scales that measure where an individual stands in terms of meeting treatment requirements. These will give a clearer picture of risks and needs.

Not content with these efforts alone, the SMART staff are working with the White House and the Office on Violence Against Women to help develop prevention and treatment options that address sexual assault on college campuses.

The SMART Office has put a huge amount of work into this effort, and I'm confident that it will lead us to a better understanding of the many issues around sex offender management and to more effective approaches that can be adapted by professionals and policymakers.

On top of all these efforts, Lou and his team have delivered substantial financial resources to the field. Since its establishment, the SMART Office has awarded some \$100 million to states, tribes, and territories to help them develop and shore up their registration and notification systems.

I think it's safe to say that the SMART Office has done a tremendous job in its 10 years of existence.

But more significant than the contributions we've made in Washington is the remarkable work all of you are doing in your jurisdictions, every day. Whether you're building and refining registration and notification systems, monitoring the movement of those who are registered, or tracking sex offenders across jurisdictions – sometimes, out of the country – the real job of protecting communities falls to each and every one of you.

You've done that job admirably. The level of coordination we've seen – across jurisdictions and across levels of government – has been impressive, and the results we've seen have been very encouraging. Our nation's sex offender management systems are working because you have made them work.

And we know it hasn't been easy. SORNA compliance has required a heavy lift from the states, territories, and tribes. In some cases, it's meant building systems virtually from scratch. But you have found a way to make it work.

This is not an idle boast. Our National Institute of Justice conducted a review of state-level SORNA implementation and found that the vast majority of states that have implemented SORNA have met most of the standards for SORNA compliance. In fact, for a majority of the standards, 90 percent of the states included in the inventory sample have either met the standards or adopted provisions that do not substantially disserve SORNA purposes. And by the way, a determination that a practice does not substantially disserve SORNA means that it meets the threshold for SORNA compliance. So the rhetoric that you hear about many states failing to comply is misleading. Even those that have not been deemed to fall into the category of substantial implementation are, in many cases, well on their way.

This says to me that the level of commitment to SORNA and to improving our collective management of sex offenders is high, and that jurisdictions are working hard to build the infrastructure necessary to keep our communities and citizens safe.

I'm proud of the strides that we've been able to make together. In 10 short years, we've come a long way toward building a comprehensive sex offender registration and notification system. Inspired by the memory of one amazing little boy who was taken from us much too soon, we've created something that has the potential to protect countless people across the country.

You're all doing amazing work, and the Department of Justice is grateful for your tireless efforts to keep our citizens, our communities, and our country safe. On behalf of our Attorney General, I thank you for all you do and I wish you a successful symposium.

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