**Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention**

**Quarterly Meeting**

**December 12, 2012**

**U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs**

**810 Seventh Street NW, Washington, DC 20531**

**Abstract**

At the December 12, 2012, quarterly meeting of the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Council), the Attorney General’s Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence presented its final report and recommendations for launching a coordinated national response to address children’s exposure to violence.

Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr., U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ); Tony West, Acting Associate Attorney General, DOJ; and Mary Lou Leary, Acting Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, DOJ, welcomed attendees and Task Force members and provided an overview of DOJ’s recent work to address the causes and consequences of children’s exposure to violence and emphasized DOJ’s commitment to address this national crisis.

To set the context for the Task Force’s report, Vincent J. Felitti, MD, Kaiser Permanente Medical Care Program, presented highlights of the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, a major research study documenting the profound long-term negative effects of childhood trauma on adult health and well-being.

Task Force Co-chair Joe Torre, Founder, Joe Torre Safe At Home Foundation; Task Force Co-chair Robert Listenbee, Jr., Chief, Juvenile Unit, Defender Association of Philadelphia; and Task Force members presented findings from the hearings the Task Force conducted across the country and formally presented their recommendations to the Attorney General.

Following the Task Force’s presentation, Council members discussed how to implement the recommendations. **Meeting Summary**

**Welcome and Opening Remarks**

***Mary Lou Leary, Acting Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs (OJP), U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ); Tony West, Acting Associate Attorney General, DOJ; Eric H. Holder, Jr., Attorney General and Council Chair***

Mary Lou Leary welcomed Council members, guests, and members of the Attorney General’s National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence. She remarked that the Task Force’s recommendations presented at this meeting will provide a blueprint for DOJ and the nation, and she thanked the Task Force for their dedication and contributions to the children of this country.

Tony West observed that children’s exposure to violence has become a national crisis, with more than 60 percent of our nation’s children exposed to some form of violence, crime, or abuse. He remarked that the Attorney General’s Defending Childhood Initiative is both the culmination of years of work and a launching pad for future efforts to address this crisis. During the Clinton Administration, under the leadership of then Deputy Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr., DOJ launched a variety of initiatives including the Safe Start Program, the Child Development–Community Policing Program, and the Greenbook Initiative. In 2011, as part of the Defending Childhood Initiative, Attorney General Holder commissioned a task force of leading experts to develop comprehensive policy recommendations that will serve as a blueprint for preventing and mitigating the negative effects of children’s exposure to violence. Mr. West observed that improving the well-being of our nation’s children is a moral imperative and a critical strategy that enhances public safety in our communities and benefits the entire nation.

Attorney General Holder welcomed meeting attendees and said that, throughout his career, he has focused on addressing the causes and consequences of children’s exposure to violence. He remarked that this issue has become both a public health crisis, imposing a cost burden on our healthcare system, and a significant criminal justice problem with growing financial and human costs. One study suggests that failing to intervene in the life of a young person at high risk of becoming delinquent will amount to more than $3 million spent over the course of that individual’s life; by contrast, the cost of effective prevention and intervention measures is typically only a few hundred or few thousand dollars per person. He said that we can be proud of the anti-violence efforts that are under way and the progress that has been made in some communities; however, as a nation we can and must do much more to protect our most vulnerable young people. He thanked Task Force Co-chairs Joe Torre and Robert Listenbee, Jr., and all the Task Force members for their work and the excellent product that they have produced, and he observed that we must act upon the Task Force’s recommendations.

**Results of the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study**

***Melodee Hanes, Acting Administrator, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), DOJ; Vincent J. Felitti, MD, Kaiser Permanente Medical Care Program***

Melodee Hanes remarked that the Task Force’s recommendations provide the federal government with an opportunity to make a difference and curb the crisis of children’s exposure to violence in this country. OJJDP hopes that these recommendations will launch a significant and powerful prevention and intervention effort across the nation. She acknowledged representatives of the 8 sites from the Defending Childhood Initiative and the 10 sites from the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention, who came to this meeting to hear the Task Force’s recommendations. She also acknowledged Futures Without Violence, which has provided critical support to the sites and Dr. Howard Spivak and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for their important research on the incidence of children’s exposure to violence. Ms. Hanes introduced Dr. Vincent Felitti, and asked him to set the context for the Task Force’s recommendations by highlighting key findings from the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study.

Dr. Felitti reported that the ACE Study, a collaboration between Kaiser Permanente and the CDC, is a major research project studying the relationship between 10 categories of traumatic experiences during childhood and the prevalence of adverse health outcomes later in life. The study, which surveyed more than 17,000 middle-aged adults, documents that adverse childhood experiences (such as physical and sexual abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction) are unexpectedly common, although well concealed, and have a profound long-term effect on adult health and well-being. The study found a striking relationship between ACE scores and smoking status, alcohol and drug abuse, obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, autoimmune disease, suicide, domestic violence, and other health and mental health problems later in life. Based on these findings, Dr. Felitti urged medical practitioners to move beyond simply collecting medical information to conducting comprehensive biopsychosocial evaluations. He suggested that practitioners should routinely seek a history of traumatic childhood experiences from all patients, inmates, and children in foster care. For more information on the ACE Study, visit [www.acestudy.org](http://www.acestudy.org).

**Defending Childhood: Recommendations**

***Moderators: Joe Torre, Founder, Joe Torre Safe At Home® Foundation; Robert Listenbee, Jr., Chief, Juvenile Unit, Defender Association of Philadelphia; Members of the Attorney General’s Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence***

Joe Torre and Robert Listenbee, Jr., thanked Attorney General Holder for calling attention to the problem of children’s exposure to violence and asked Task Force members to introduce themselves. Task Force members attending the Council meeting included Torre; Listenbee; Sharon W. Cooper, MD; Sarah Deer, JD; Deanne Tilton Durfee; Thea James, MD; Alicia Leiberman, Ph.D.; Robert Macy, Ph.D.; Steven Marans, Ph.D.; Jim McDonnell; Georgina Mendoza, JD; and Major General (Ret.) Antonio Taguba. Task Force member Father Gregory Boyle, SJ, was unable to attend the meeting due to illness. The Task Force members unanimously voted to adopt the recommendations contained in *Defending Childhood: Report of the Attorney General’s National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence* and formally presented their recommendations to the Attorney General.

Mr. Torre observed that children’s exposure to violence is a national crisis and thanked the Attorney General for bringing this issue to light. He spoke candidly about the impact of his own traumatic childhood experiences. He observed that, as the Task Force listened to testimony across the country, he was particularly struck by the testimony in Albuquerque, NM, from members of rural, tribal communities and by testimony in Detroit, MI, from former gang members. He emphasized that children and young people need to be part of the solution. He concluded, “Children are our treasure. They are the future of this country. We need to educate the adults who work with children so they can reach out to children who have experienced trauma.”

Dr. Marans told the story of 16-year-old Andre, a patient who had been shot in a drug-related incident. Andre had a troubled history: he had experienced medical problems and invasive treatments as a child, his mother was severely depressed and unable to hold a job, his drug-addicted father beat Andre and his mother, the family frequently moved, Andre experienced academic problems and had stopped attending school, and he was in the court system by the time of the shooting. Following his release from the hospital, he was arrested, convicted, and incarcerated for dealing drugs. Dr. Marans observed that service providers (police, courts, schools, etc.) had missed numerous opportunities to serve Andre and his mother. He stated that today we know about the connection between children’s exposure to violence and poor long-term outcomes including substance abuse, mental health disorders, chronic health problems, and violent behaviors, and we know that outcomes are worse when traumatized children don’t receive the services they need. He argued that it is time to capitalize on what we have learned about interventions for children who have been traumatized—effective screening methods, trauma-informed interventions and treatment, culturally informed services, and community coordination among service providers—to ensure that training and resources are available to those who respond to children exposed to violence. He asserted that our country has the knowledge, leadership, economic resources, and talent to effectively respond to children exposed to violence and help these children recover. He concluded by stating, “Every child we help to recover from exposure to violence is an investment in our nation’s future, and it’s our nation’s investment in our children.”

Ms. Mendoza said that the Task Force is hopeful that implementation of their recommendations will change how we as a society think about children exposed to violence and help children, families, and communities rise out of violence and thrive. However, it is only by addressing the root causes of violence that we can hope to make sustainable, systematic change and create a healthier, safer society for our children to grow and prosper. The Task Force looked at a variety of strategies, programs, and services that help children heal from trauma and found that the most promising programs have a multidisciplinary, coordinated community response; assessment; trauma-informed services; culturally relevant and strengths-based programs; and a comprehensive, balanced approach that addresses prevention, intervention, enforcement, and reentry. She said that as communities develop a coordinated community response, it is important to include every provider and agency that touches the lives of children (e.g., representatives of law enforcement, the courts, education, healthcare, faith-based community), policymakers, families, community members, and youth. She concluded by asserting that we cannot afford to ignore this national crisis of children’s exposure to violence and that we need to stop investing our limited resources in activities that don’t work; instead we should rely on the best data and research and strategically invest in our nation’s children.

Mr. Listenbee spoke about the need to rethink our juvenile justice system. He observed that placement of juvenile offenders often doesn’t address a youth’s needs. Our country spends huge amounts on secure confinement (in Pennsylvania, the cost is approximately $150,000 per youth for a year), but we are not helping these children. He argued that offenders need trauma-informed care if we want to break the cycle of violence. He quoted Task Force member Rev. Gregory Boyle, SJ: “There has to be humanity and dignity for the offender as well as for the victim. We need to address their trauma in order to break the cycle of violence and in order to make our communities safe.” Mr. Listenbee summarized two of the Task Force’s key recommendations related to juvenile justice:

* Make trauma-informed screening, assessment, and care the standard in juvenile justice services.
* Whenever possible, prosecute young offenders in the juvenile justice system instead of transferring their cases to adult courts.

On behalf of the Task Force, Mr. Listenbee thanked Dr. Julian Ford, principal writer of the Task Force’s report, Judith Ann Lynn of the Joe Torre Safe At Home Foundation, Rhonda McKitten of the Defender Association of Philadelphia, and Catherine Pierce of DOJ for their valuable assistance.

**Discussion of Task Force Recommendations**

***Coordinating Council Members; Task Force Members***

Melodee Hanes facilitated a discussion of the Task Force recommendations.

Judge Steven Jones (practitioner member) observed that many states are faced with limited resources, and the Task Force’s report is a blueprint for the best way for states to spend their money. He suggested that the report be sent to the states with the Attorney General’s signature. Ms. Hanes said that DOJ intends to disseminate the report quickly.

Pamela Hyde (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) provided an overview of SAMHSA’s recent efforts and opportunities for cross-agency work including the National Child Traumatic Stress Initiative, the Safe Schools Healthy Students Initiative, and the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care. She offered four recommendations regarding implementing the Task Force’s recommendations and offered SAMHSA’s assistance in carrying out her recommendations:

1. “Move upstream” and place more emphasis on diversion.
2. Focus more conscious attention on substance abuse.
3. When addressing goal 5 (which focuses on local coalition building), build on the efforts of SAMHSA and other agencies.
4. Identify the four or five outcomes that Council agencies wish to collectively measure.

Jonodev Chaudhuri (U.S. Department of the Interior [DOI]) urged the Attorney General to disseminate this report to tribal courts. He said he is pleased with the recommendation regarding appointing a federal task force to examine the needs of American Indian/Alaska Native children exposed to violence and said DOI would like to work with DOJ on this issue.

Jane Oates (U.S. Department of Labor) urged federal agencies to think of concrete ways to move these recommendations forward. For example, look for ways to build these recommendations into next year’s discretionary grants.

Judge Gordon Martin (practitioner member) applauded the Task Force’s emphasis on keeping juveniles out of adult courts and observed that it is important to provide guidance to the states.

David Mineta (White House Office of National Drug Control Policy) said he appreciates the Task Force’s emphasis on youth involvement. He said that many Council agencies already have youth involvement and suggested that all federal partners involve youth so youth have a pipeline and feel comfortable talking with adults.

**Summary and Meeting Adjournment**

***Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr.***

Attorney General Holder thanked Task Force members and the co-chairs for their work. He said the Task Force’s findings will play a critical role in raising the consciousness of the nation about the challenges faced by children exposed to violence and what we can do to overcome these challenges. He vowed that the 56 recommendations in this report will not be shelved. He said that as long as he remains Attorney General, this issue will remain a priority for DOJ and the Department will work to institutionalize these recommendations. He added that DOJ will continue to focus on rural and tribal areas. He said he looks forward to working together with Council agencies to move these recommendations forward and to take better care of the children who will form the America of the 21st century.