

RONAL SERPAS

REMARKS INTRODUCING PRESIDENT OBAMA

THE WHITE HOUSE

OCTOBER 22, 2015

Thank you, Madam Attorney General – thank you for your career in the public interest, for your leadership, and for having us here today.

I am honored to be here as the co-chair of an exciting and important new group, Law Enforcement Leaders to Reduce Crime and Incarceration. I want to especially acknowledge my co-chair, Chicago Superintendent of Police Garry McCarthy – a dedicated public servant and a national leader in the emerging fight for reform. Law Enforcement Leaders is a project of the Brennan Center for Justice at New York School of Law.

Many members of Law Enforcement Leaders are here with us today. And on behalf of all of us, we want to thank you, Madame Attorney General, and the members of the Administration for taking on this vital challenge.

Our organization, we hope, can be a new force and voice in the debate. We are more than 130 current and former law enforcement leaders – police chiefs prosecutors ... sheriffs ... district attorneys ... U.S. Attorneys ... Attorneys General, and corrections officials. We hail from all 50 states. Collectively, we've come to the aid of thousands of victims by identifying, arresting and successfully prosecuting thousands of violent criminals. This is how the Criminal Justice System is most efficient and effective in creating a safer America. Identifying and arresting low-level offenders is and will always be important, but the process takes valuable time away from investigations into violent criminal cases. Arresting low-level offenders also limits the bed space we need in our jails and prisons. Our organization's mission is to make clear to our country today: We can reduce crime *and* reduce incarceration.

I was a police officer for thirty-four years, serving as police chief in Nashville, as chief of the Washington State Patrol, and recently as the superintendent of the New Orleans police department. Police keep our streets safe not by putting more people in prison – but by putting the most violent people in prison. Today our nation makes up 5% of the world's population. But- amazingly- 25% of incarcerated people worldwide are in America's jails and prisons. And while it may sound counterintuitive, I believe, and our members believe, we can do better – we can protect our communities while ending mass incarceration.

I want to share with you the statement of principles on which we have agreed.

In here is our mission statement: “Protecting public safety is a vital goal. From experience and through data-driven and innovative practices, we know the country can reduce crime while also reducing unnecessary arrests, prosecutions, and incarceration. We can also reduce recidivism and strengthen relationships with communities. With the goal of building a smarter, stronger, and fairer criminal justice system, we are joining together to urge a change in laws and practices to reduce incarceration while continuing to keep our communities safe.”

We are here today to thank President Obama for his leadership – for his powerful voice, for his compassion, and for the steps he and his administration have taken. We are here to call on him and Congress to work together to enact legislation to reform our criminal justice system – legislation such as the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act recently introduced by Senator Grassley and his colleagues.

And we are here today to say to those in public office: We, America's law enforcement leaders, stand ready to speak out, stand with you, and work with you for change.

Thank you. We look forward to hearing from the President and the panel.