

JUSTICE NEWS

Attorney General Jeff Sessions Delivers Remarks at Sergeants Benevolent Association of New York City Award Presentation

Washington, DC ~ Friday, May 12, 2017

Thank you, Ed [Mullins]. It's an incredible honor to receive this recognition from the Sergeants Benevolent Association of New York City. I am proud that the rank-and-file consider me a friend of the New York City Police Department (NYPD), and of all our nation's brave law enforcement personnel. You know how much I respect you and the ground-breaking work the NYPD has done to reduce violence in your city. I have long expressed my admiration for your success.

There's no doubt that the last few years have been tough times for law enforcement in America. Morale among law enforcement has fallen. Fatal shootings of officers went up last year.

Most Americans, however, know what I know. Our police are one of the institutions that enjoys the highest confidence of the American public. That's because they see you every day on their streets and in their neighborhoods.

You don't do this work for recognition, and you certainly don't do it for the money. You do it for the lives saved, the streets made safer, the bad guys brought to justice. You chose this work to serve and protect us all, and make our country safer and better. There is a sense of satisfaction from doing our duty to see that justice is done.

As we begin National Police Week, I want every law enforcement officer in America to know this: We honor your service. We remember the sacrifices of your brothers and sisters who have fallen in the line of duty. And we are grateful for all you do to keep us safe.

We here at the Department of Justice will continue to remind all Americans what a noble calling this is – so other good people will also choose to answer it like you each did.

I would also encourage all Americans this week to find your own way to show your gratitude to the people of law enforcement. Bring a home-cooked meal to your local precinct, go to a memorial service or simply shake the hand of a police officer and say, "Thank you for your service."

Under President Trump, this Department of Justice will have your back. We will do all that we can to keep you safe and to promote public support for honorable officers in your dangerous work.

I call on everyone to remember that it's not our privileged communities that suffer the most from crime and violence. Regardless of wealth or race, every American has the right to demand a safe neighborhood.

And we will do our part. Today, I am announcing that I sent a memo to each of our U.S. Attorney's last night establishing charging and sentencing policy for this Department of Justice. Our responsibility is to fulfill our role in a way that accords with the law, advances public safety and promotes respect for and consistency in our legal system and the work you do.

Charging and sentencing recommendations are bedrock responsibilities for any federal prosecutor. And I trust our prosecutors in the field to make good judgements. They deserve to be unhandcuffed and not micro-managed from Washington. Rather, they must be permitted to apply the law to the facts of each investigation. Let's be clear, we are enforcing the laws Congress passed – that is both our fundamental mission and constitutional duty.

Going forward, I have empowered our prosecutors to charge and pursue the most serious, readily provable offense. It means we are going to meet our responsibility to enforce the law with judgment and fairness. It is simply the right and moral thing to do. But it is important to note that unlike previous charging memoranda, I have given our prosecutors discretion to avoid sentences that would result in an injustice.

This is a key part of President Trump's promise to keep America safe. We're seeing an increase in violent crime in our cities – in Baltimore, Chicago, Memphis, Milwaukee, St. Louis and many others. The murder rate has surged 10 percent nationwide – the largest increase since 1968. And we know that drugs and crime go hand-in-hand. Drug trafficking is an inherently violent business. If you want to collect a drug debt, you can't file a lawsuit in court. You collect it by the barrel of a gun.

In 2015, more than 52,000 Americans died from a drug overdose. According to a report by the New England Journal of Medicine, the price of heroin is down, the availability is up and the purity is up. We intent to reverse that trend. So we are returning to the enforcement of the law as passed by Congress – plain and simple. If you are a drug trafficker, we will not look the other way. We will not be willfully blind to your conduct. We are talking about a kilogram of heroin – that is 10,000 doses, five kilograms of cocaine and 1,000 kilograms of marijuana. These are not low-level offenders. These are drug dealers. And you're going to prison.

Working with integrity and professionalism, attorneys who implement this policy will meet the high standards required by the Department of Justice and together we will win this fight.

Once again, I thank all our brave men and women in law enforcement for your service. And thanks again to you, Ed, and to the Sergeants Benevolent Association of New York City for this honor.

Speaker:

Attorney General Jeff Sessions

Component(s):

Office of the Attorney General

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