

Justice and Public Safety in the Twenty-First Century

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Good morning. It is a real privilege to speak with you this morning about the extraordinary opportunities we have in the area of information technology. I regret that I am not able to join you personally this morning, but I would like to take advantage of our technology to speak with you about using technology to share information between and among law enforcement and criminal justice agencies to improve and enhance in every way possible our ability to fight crime.

The information technology industry has given us some remarkable tools, but with these tools come some extraordinary challenges for law enforcement. Advances in technology have created new kinds of crime and criminals who keep pace with, if not out-run, our new crime fighting tools. It is estimated that by the year 2000, a vast majority of criminals may be computer literate. With this literacy, they will have new opportunities for crime directly related to computer systems such as software piracy and theft of intangible property. This literacy will also enable criminals to perpetrate traditional crimes such as theft, embezzlement, gambling, drug trafficking, and pornography on a much wider scale. Super-sophisticated criminals have even turned technology against law enforcement by using computers, cellular phones, and other devices to gather counterintelligence on law enforcement operations.

In addition, we have the challenge of keeping current. In just the five years that I have been Attorney General, I realize that as each day goes by, something we purchased in those five years has become obsolete. We must mitigate this problem by appropriate strategic planning, encouraging coordination and cooperation between government and private industry, encouraging the development of information sharing standards, and building carefully so that we build for the future with the resources we have. We must ensure links and interoperability within the Department of Justice, between the Department and all Federal agencies, and especially with state and local criminal justice agencies. We must make sure that we do not duplicate efforts with expensive systems that only serve one use, or one criminal justice component. This equipment is going to be too expensive to afford this luxury. We must plan ahead to ensure that we use taxpayers' dollars as wisely as possible. We must balance privacy interests with the need to catch the bad guys and to protect our property and our people. To do this, we must acquire information technology tools, and it is imperative that we build prudently.

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The ultimate challenge is how to do all this—how do we use the tools at our command? how do we build and buy prudently? how do we get the bad guys?—while at the same time protecting our Constitution, our rights of privacy, and all the principles that we hold dear in this democracy.

One way is to work together to build an effective, responsible, integrated information-sharing capability between all law enforcement and other criminal justice agencies. This includes information-sharing architectures between law enforcement, courts, prosecution, public defense, corrections, probation, and parole offices. It also means the ability to share information between state and local jurisdictions and with the Federal Government.

In February 1997, at the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association (AFCEA) Virtual Government Conference, I announced that the Department of Justice was pleased to accept the leadership role for the development of a Global Criminal Justice Information Network, a capability under Vice-President Gore's Access America initiative. The Department has taken steps toward developing this information-sharing capability. The Department's Office of Justice Programs and Justice Management Division are working together on this very critical initiative. So far this year, the Justice Management Division has convened an advisory body to develop core requirements for the Global Information-Sharing Network. The Office of Justice Programs is working to facilitate integrated information-sharing at the state and local level through the strategic use of federal grants for information technology, and by encouraging cooperation, dialogue, planning, and peer-to-peer counseling at the state and local level.

Another important step toward a global information-sharing capability is for the Department to develop its own Department of Justice consolidated network. I know many of you are concerned, as am I, that there are difficulties in communication between parts of the Department of Justice. It was frustrating to become Attorney General to discover that the FBI cannot really communicate directly with the DEA, which really cannot communicate with the Marshal's Service, which never talks to Treasury through modern technology. If we can get these agencies going in the same direction within our own Department of Justice, we will have a powerful force to prevent crime, to solve crime, and still protect the privacy of all Americans. We still have much work to do to complete this action, but we are now well on our way toward our own Justice consolidated network.

In overseeing the development of our own consolidated network, I can appreciate the challenges you face in developing and implementing integrated information systems in your jurisdictions. The challenges of working with existing, yet outdated, information systems that are in place; the challenges of strategically planning systems which will take us into the future; the challenges of overcoming traditional "turf" battles between criminal justice agencies which impede the free flow of information; and the challenges of doing all of this on a limited budget stagger the imagination.

Now, more than ever, coordination and cooperation in the criminal justice community is imperative to building a successful and useful crime fighting

tools—relating to access to information. Why is access to information so important, and why is it so important that we develop a partnership with each other? You know yourselves how urgent it is to have the right information at the right time and place. In your lines of work, lives often depend upon this. When I talk about information-sharing, I usually emphasize three aspects which I believe are critical to the missions of our government organizations and to the effective support of the American people. To me, what is so necessary in our daily business is that we must be able to share information in the most timely, secure, and cost-effective manner possible.

First is the issue of timeliness. The criminal justice community needs the capability of linking information rapidly in order to solve crimes, and more importantly, to prevent crimes. Second, in order for the criminal justice community to share information securely, we need to protect our information from attack and misuse. Third, since our resources are limited, we must be able to share information in the most cost-effective manner possible. If we are to meet each of these three requirements, it is absolutely necessary that we all work together—state, local, and federal criminal justice players—and that we all work with the private sector and other branches of government. That is why I am very supportive of efforts like the California Intergovernmental Coordinating Council, which brings together components of the criminal justice system, including the public defender. These kinds of wholly cooperative efforts are so very important to breaking down the barriers to true integration and to effective communication.

To me, these three aspects of information-sharing must be included in any discussion of networking initiatives. Working together, we must be willing to see this kind of sharing as our ultimate goal. We must challenge ourselves to overcome any obstacle that would prevent us from reaching this goal.

In closing, I want to thank Government Technology for the opportunity to speak with you today and I want to applaud all of you for your commitment to improving the criminal justice system.

Information-sharing in the criminal justice system is the right thing to do. We need to provide our entire community with the ability to access, use, and share all information necessary to respond to and resolve the consequences of criminal activity. The technology is there for us to do just this. There is a willingness of all the criminal justice agencies to meet this need. There is support for this effort at the highest levels of government. We have talked about such a network capability for a long, long time, and it is now time to do something.

Finally, we need to ensure that our investments in information technology are directed toward common goals of information-sharing, not continued development of systems that do not talk to each other.

I know I am “preaching to the choir.” I also know that there are formidable challenges that must be met for implementation of this information architecture. I encourage you to work together to overcome these and other obstacles you will undoubtedly encounter. I am confident that, working together, we can overcome these and many other challenges that are likely to arise.

I wish I could be there to ask you in person the question that I always try to ask when I meet with groups like you. If you were the Attorney General of the United States, what would you do to improve the networking that is so essential to modern-day crime fighting? How would you address the problems I have discussed today? How can the Department of Justice more effectively serve you? Please let me know if you have ideas by writing to me in Washington at the Department of Justice.¹ Your answers from the people on the front lines often provide some of the best solutions.

Thank you for all you are doing.

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