



National Alliance to
End Sexual Violence

A NATIONAL VOICE FOR STATE
AND LOCAL ADVOCATES DEDICATED
TO ENDING SEXUAL VIOLENCE.

April 1, 2011

Attorney General Speaks at DOJ's Sexual Assault Awareness Month Program

Following is a transcript of Attorney General Eric Holder's comments acknowledging Sexual Assault Awareness Month:

Thank you, [Congressman] Tom [Perrelli]. I appreciate your kind words, and, more importantly, your outstanding leadership. Your talent for bringing people together has enabled this administration, and this Department, to deliver on last year's promise to address the causes and consequences of sexual assault with renewed focus, purpose, and urgency.

Of course, these achievements would not be possible without our Office on Violence Against Women, which leads the Justice Department's efforts to raise awareness about sexual assault and to combat these devastating crimes. Since opening its doors 15 years ago, OVW has awarded more than \$3.5 billion in grants to some of our nation's most effective victim service providers and programs. This office has been instrumental in helping victims of sexual assault find assistance and empowering survivors to seek justice. It's also created a forum for providers and advocates from across the field to come together and to share cutting-edge research, best practices, and innovative strategies. to heal and empower survivors, to provide hope, to raise awareness, and to improve lives.

Catherine Pierce has been a part of this work from the start. Although she often says that she's witnessed the great progress OVW has made over the years, Catherine has actually helped lead this progress. I'm grateful to her, and I know that OVW's enthusiastic new director, Sue Carbon, looks forward to building on all that this office has achieved. As a former judge myself, I know that, after nearly two decades of service on the bench, Sue will bring a unique and insightful perspective to OVW's work. Her experience and expertise will allow the department to reach new communities, strengthen current partnerships and provide enhanced support for OVW grantees.

I'm glad that so many of our grantees are here with us today. We are honored to support the work you do

Let me also welcome our other special guests who have joined us to share their experiences facing and fighting sexual assault. Their courage inspires us all. And their stories illustrate – far

better than I possibly could – the reasons why ending sexual assault must be a priority across this department, this administration and this nation.

We all know what we're up against. Our own research shows that nearly 19 million women and 3 million men have experienced at least one incident of sexual assault. Confronting this reality is difficult. It's often painful. But it's also important. Acknowledging and discussing the prevalence of sexual assault creates opportunities to act, to assist, to educate, and to collaborate.

We should all be encouraged by President Obama's historic commitment to shining a light on this problem and to seeking new pathways toward help, healing and justice. Many of you in this room made the commitment we celebrate, and the progress we've seen, possible. For years, you've given voice to this problem. You've stood up for victims in crisis and communities in need. And you've called for the resources – as well as the leadership – necessary to address and to end sexual assault.

The President's most recent budget is a testament to your efforts — and to his focus on reversing current trends. For Fiscal Year 2011, an increase of nearly \$30 million was requested for our Office on Violence Against Women. The budget doubles funding – from \$15 million to \$30 million – for our Sexual Assault Services Program, which provides crisis intervention, criminal justice advocacy and support during forensic exams. Funding for civil legal assistance for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault would be increased by \$9 million. And, for the first time, the Office for Victims of Crime would set aside \$100 million in funds specifically to address violence against women.

These investments are critical. And I will ensure that this department and our partners have the resources necessary to combat sexual assault and bring offenders to justice. This issue is deeply important to me. During a career spent as a prosecutor, a judge and a United States Attorney, I have seen the effects of sexual violence — in the courtroom and far beyond. I understand how these crimes can devastate lives, families and communities. But I've never been more hopeful about our ability to make meaningful progress in ending sexual assault.

I know this progress won't come as easily or as quickly as we would like. But there's no question that this work is a priority for this administration and for this department. In fact, over the last two months, a dozen members of the department's leadership team have traveled to college campuses across the country to discuss the problem of sexual assault. Not only are they raising awareness about the problem, they're increasing our odds of eliminating it. I'm proud of this work, and I'm encouraged by the new investments we'll make this year. But I also recognize that the Justice Department can't tackle such a challenge on its own. The federal government can't either. Progress will depend on our ability to work together — with those serving in the field and with our state, local, tribal and community partners.

I'm committed to this progress. I'm proud to count you all as partners in this work of prevention and healing. And I look forward to what we will accomplish together.

Thank you.