

New York State Association of PBAs conference

July 9, 2014

Good afternoon, and thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. First, I want to thank Mike Palladino for that great introduction. Mike is a dedicated officer of the law, and a powerful advocate for his brothers and sisters in law enforcement -- in New York City, as head of the NYPD Detectives Endowment Association -- and across the state through his leadership of this important organization.

You represent 45,000 amazing New Yorkers. PBAs watch out for those who watch out for everyone else -- people who put their lives on the line every day to keep New Yorkers safe.

From our biggest cities and counties to some of the smallest police departments in the state, you know what it takes to protect the public -- and to protect your members -- as they perform their duties.

What it takes is an approach to crime that is both tough and smart. As the state's chief law enforcement officer, I understand the challenges you face every day. And I view it as part of my job to provide whatever help I can to my colleagues in law enforcement.

My commitment to the American justice system goes back long before I was elected attorney general.

After I graduated from college, I served for two years as a deputy sheriff in Massachusetts, working in the Berkshire County House of Corrections. Then, after law school I clerked in Federal District Court in Manhattan, hearing some major criminal cases.

I then went into private practice, which included a lot of cases dealing with both civil and criminal fraud, and I also did some pro bono work. I actually set up a program to recruit volunteer lawyers to represent community groups trying to shut down crack houses.

In one case, I worked with the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development to evict dozens of drug dealers from an address that the Queens borough president called "probably the most troubled building in the Borough of Queens."

That pro bono work, by the way, is where law enforcement and public service really came together for me, and after I was elected to the New York State Senate, I became the ranking member, and then the chair, of the Codes Committee, which deals with all of New York's criminal justice issues.

And now that I am attorney general, the justice system is my life's work.

That is why I have consistently opposed misguided attempts to reform our criminal justice system in ways that would tie your hands or make your officers more vulnerable. I opposed the shoot-to-wound bill, which I refused to co-sponsor every time I was asked to do so by my colleagues in the Senate.

That is why I oppose bills pending today that would give the attorney general jurisdiction in cases of police misconduct if the local district attorney declines to prosecute.

As the state's chief law enforcement officer, I am committed to working with you and, whenever possible, to giving you and your departments the tools you need to keep your officers safe.

Since 1984, 71 law enforcement officers have been shot and killed in the line of duty in New York State. Twenty-nine different law-enforcement agencies have experienced the tragedy of a gunfire death in their ranks. During that same time period, the National Institute of Justice estimates that bulletproof vests saved more than 3,000 police officers' lives nationwide.

So giving every cop a bulletproof vest should be a no-brainer, right? But the gridlock in Washington has been choking off the federal matching grants that were promised to local law enforcement organizations back in 1998. In fact, since 2010, federal grants to New York State law enforcement agencies for bulletproof vests have decreased 81 percent.

Because of these cuts in federal funding, many departments can't afford vests for new recruits, or to replace vests for veteran officers.

That's just wrong. So we stepped up, and my office created the inVEST Partnership. Through this partnership, we are devoting \$3.5 million in forfeiture funds to help law enforcement agencies all over the state buy bulletproof vests for every police officer who needs one.

As of yesterday, more than 110 agencies statewide, including more than 10 of the police departments that belong to the New York State Association of PBAs, had applied for inVEST funding.

The deadline is next Tuesday, so if your department hasn't applied, there's still time for my office to help you pay for lifesaving equipment for your fellow officers. Mike Meade, my director of intergovernmental affairs, is at the table in the back of the room and will be there until 4:00 to answer questions and get you started. You can fill out an application today, or take one home and send it back to us, so your department can take advantage of this lifesaving program.

I have worked hard to make the office of the attorney general more proactive in getting cops what they need to be tough -- and smart -- on crime. I am proud to be your partner and work with you to make New York as safe as it can possibly be.

That means making sure you have the tools to do the job. It also means getting illegal guns off our streets, while preserving the right of responsible, law-abiding New Yorkers to own and keep firearms.

My office partners with local police departments all over the state to conduct gun buybacks. We take any kind of gun -- working, nonworking -- no questions asked, and give cash to remove dangerous illegal firearms from our streets.

And I am very proud of the work we have done to close the gun show loophole in New York. Soon after I took office, I became aware that a lot of vendors at gun shows were not doing required background checks on buyers.

So we sent undercover investigators into gun shows around the state, and it didn't matter what story they told the sellers – that their wives had gotten orders of protection against them, that the police had come and taken their guns away – they were still able to buy guns without a background check.

We arrested the sellers, but then, instead of going on the attack and grandstanding, we sat down with the operators of the gun shows and together drew up a set of Attorney General Model Protocols to close the gun show loophole. Every gun brought into a gun show is tagged. We seal the perimeter of the show – most operators use off-duty police officers for this. And you can't leave the gun show with a gun you did not bring in without a receipt showing that a background check was done.

And then, one by one, all of the other gun show operators in New York State voluntarily signed on to these model protocols. By working with the gun show operators, we are making sure that people who should not have guns – people with histories of violence or mental illness, who pose a danger to police officers and to the public – cannot get guns, while preserving the rights of law-abiding gun owners.

Responsible gun owners are not the enemy. The only way to make this country safe from illegal guns is to end the poisonous rhetoric about gun ownership and instead get law enforcement and responsible gun owners working together. That's being tough and smart, and that's what we are doing.

My office also takes a tough and smart approach when it comes to the crisis of illegal drugs that have flooded our streets and ruined so many lives.

My office's organized crime task force investigates and prosecutes criminal activities across county, state, and even international lines, and I am very proud of the work the investigators and lawyers in my office have done in this fight.

We have partnered with local police departments all over the state, and with the state police and federal agencies, to bring down international drug gangs, take hundreds of dangerous drug dealers off our streets and stop the flow of deadly narcotics into our neighborhoods.

In just the last two months, we worked with the state police and the Department of Homeland Security to bring a 140-count indictment against a drug ring that was trafficking cocaine between Upper Manhattan and Dutchess County and funneling the proceeds to the Dominican Republic.

We worked with the Albany Police Department to bring a 340-count indictment charging 25 people with distributing heroin, cocaine and illegal prescription drugs between New York City and the Capital Region.

We worked with the NYPD to arrest 17 people on charges of trafficking khat, a potent amphetamine-like plant, across four continents, throughout New York State and into parts of Massachusetts and Ohio.

And that was just in the last two months.

So far this year, investigations by my office into illegal drug activity have brought 49 felony arrests and resulted in the seizure of \$220,000 in cash and two and a half kilos of cocaine. Since 2011, we have broken up 17 major drugs rings, recovered \$1.3 million from drug dealers, confiscated 79 kilos of

cocaine, more than 500 grams of crack and more than 2,500 grams of heroin, and made 345 felony arrests of drug dealers and kingpins statewide.

And we have gone beyond busting traditional drug gangs to deal with new problems. Let me give you two examples.

We received disturbing reports of violent and deadly incidents from all over the state that were linked to synthetic drugs, like bath salts. But ordinary law enforcement methods didn't work, because the chemists who cooked this poisonous stuff up in the lab changed their chemical makeup faster than lawmakers could make them illegal.

We knew we needed a different approach, and we found one.

We used New York's consumer protection and labeling laws to bring civil actions against the head shops selling this stuff.

We got injunctions in courts all across the state and cleared these dangerous products off the shelves. In some cases, the head shops closed down completely.

My office took a similar creative approach to an even bigger problem – the epidemic of prescription pain pills that have led so many New Yorkers, especially young people, into addiction and that serve as a gateway to heroin abuse.

People who would never dream of buying street drugs were becoming hooked on pain pills after an injury.

When I took office, prescription drug abuse was a national epidemic. We realized that we had to choke off the supply of these dangerous drugs to help prevent people from becoming addicted in the first place. So, with the support of the New York State Association of PBAs and other law enforcement agencies, we organized a statewide coalition and got Albany to pass the I-STOP program – the Internet System for Tracking Overprescribing – to choke the flood of prescription narcotic pain pills off at the source.

I-STOP requires every doctor and pharmacist to check a real-time database to see if a patient has one prescription for pain pills -- or 20. Since last August, when that mandate took effect, according to the New York State Department of Health, I-STOP has reduced doctor-shopping by 75 percent. We have severed a key link in the deadly chain of addiction and helped identify patients who have become addicted, so they can get into treatment.

We are also giving police officers the ability to save lives when there is an overdose by providing the funds to give naloxone – a proven antidote to heroin overdose – to any police department in the state that wants it.

So far, 135 law enforcement agencies around the state have been approved to receive more than 27,000 naloxone kits under my Community Overdose Prevention, or COP, Program. These include 16 of

your member departments, including the Nassau County Police Department, the MTA Police, the Suffolk County Police Department and the Lynbrook Police Department.

Finally, we are taking a smart, tough and creative approach to the fastest-growing property crime in America — the violent, sometimes deadly, theft of smartphones.

As I travel across New York, I constantly hear about smartphone theft. This is not a problem that any one state or police department can solve alone. This is not only a national, but an international, epidemic.

In 2013, more than 3 million mobile devices were stolen in the United States. That's twice as many as were stolen in 2012. About half of all robberies in New York City in 2013 involved a mobile device — and you all know that it's not limited to big cities. Small towns and suburbs and rural communities have had innocent people assaulted and even killed by thieves who want their phones, because they have a resale value in the hundreds, or even thousands, of dollars.

The only way to stop these violent thefts is to make stolen phones useless, so they can be shut off the way you can cancel your credit card. And that means getting the smartphone makers to install kill switches in their devices so they are worthless on the black market.

So, last May, San Francisco District Attorney George Gascon and I launched the Secure Our Smartphones Initiative, to pressure the industry to do the right thing and protect its customers — and law enforcement agencies from all over the country, and even around the world, signed on, including the NYPD.

When we started, the smartphone industry resisted the notion that they bore any responsibility for their customers' safety. Some said there was nothing they could do — and even if they could install a kill switch, it would never work.

Well, in just one year, we have pressured some major smartphone makers — who had resisted installing kill switches — into doing just that. And it is working.

Preliminary statistics released just last month show that in the first five months of 2014, after Apple rolled out its Activation Lock security system, thefts of Apple phones fell 16 percent in New York City from the same period the previous year, while thefts of Samsung smartphones increased a whopping 51 percent. In the six months after Apple introduced Activation Lock, iPhone thefts fell 24 percent in London and 38 percent in San Francisco when compared to the six months before Activation Lock was installed.

There is still a long way to go, because as long as some phones can still be reprogrammed and reused after they're stolen, thieves will still be tempted to steal them. But we've shown that it can be done — and I have our more than 100 SOS coalition members, including many represented in this room, to thank for our success.

InVEST, the Attorney General Model Gun Show Protocols, I-STOP and the Secure Our Smartphones Initiative are some of the tough, smart, creative approaches my office has taken to stopping crime. I am proud that as the state's top law enforcement officer, I am your partner in making New York safer.

Public safety is our most fundamental right. If we as a government cannot do that, it doesn't matter what else we do.

Read the Constitution. It's there in the very first sentence: "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense."

Those three goals come before everything else. To establish justice, insure domestic tranquility and provide for the common defense.

You all have a lot to be proud of. Washington, Adams, Jefferson and the other Founders would be proud of the work we are doing in New York.

That's what I'm about. That's what you're about. And I look forward to working with you as we seek to live up to that constitutional guarantee for many years to come.

Thank you.