FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE                                                                                          AG

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2010                                                           (202) 514-2007

[WWW.JUSTICE.GOV](http://www.justice.gov/)                                                                        TDD (202) 514-1888

**REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER**

**AT SAFE SHORES – THE DC CHILDREN’S ADVOCACY CENTER**

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Thank you, J.C. [Hayward].  It is good to be with you and to be among so many friends, colleagues, and committed partners.  I am honored to accept this wonderful award and to be recognized with Neil Albert, Kimberley Shellman-Borna, and Bud Cramer – three leaders I have long admired and been privileged to work alongside. Congratulations to each of you.

This evening, I’m especially grateful for the opportunity to tell Michele Booth Cole and her team – as well as the Safe Shores Board of Directors and its circle of volunteers and supporters – how much I appreciate the work you do, the difference you make, and the hope that you bring to children and families across our nation’s capital.

For the last 15 years, Safe Shores has served as an ally, advocate, and lifeline for thousands of young people in need and in crisis.  Your dedication to helping children who have suffered abuse and been exposed to violence, and your effectiveness in helping families access desperately needed care and counsel, is – quite simply – unparalleled.

I’ve had the privilege of working with Safe Shores since its earliest days, when I served as Washington, D.C.’s United States Attorney.  I was impressed then, and I continue to be inspired, by the Children’s Advocacy Center approach.  I have seen, firsthand, the progress that can be made, and the healing that is possible, when medical and mental health providers, social services professionals, victim advocates and investigators, and lawyers and law enforcement officials join forces in the prevention, intervention, and prosecution of child abuse cases.

Today, Safe Shores is a model of public-private collaboration at its best, an example for Child Advocacy Centers across – and beyond – the country, and a critical partner in the work of seeking and administering justice.  Not only have you helped children in crisis summon the strength to hold their offenders accountable, you’ve also given voice to every victim’s right to respect, restitution, and relief.  In the last 15 years, the breadth and scope of what you’ve accomplished – even amid budget cuts, funding challenges, and mounting caseloads – is nothing short of astonishing.

In the last Fiscal Year alone, Safe Shores served nearly 900 young people who’d witnessed or experienced violence; provided much-needed clothing and supplies to more than 400 kids; helped nearly 200 caregivers navigate devastating situations; and opened a new, state-of-the-art facility that, already, is taking your work to the next level.

All of this, and much more, was accomplished with help from the supporters, partners, and volunteers in this room and – incredibly – with a staff of just nine people.

Tonight is an important opportunity for us to think about how we can strengthen and expand current efforts, and – on a larger scale – how we can more effectively address the causes and remedy the consequences of childhood exposure to violence.

For me, this issue has been both a personal and professional concern for decades.  As a judge, as a U.S. Attorney, and as the Deputy Attorney General, protecting children at risk and in need was at the forefront of my work.  Today, as our nation’s Attorney General and as a parent, it remains a top priority.

As many of you know, the Justice Department has been working with leading researchers to take an in-depth look at the problem of children exposed to violence.  Last fall, we released the findings from our *National Survey on Children Exposed to Violence* – the first comprehensive assessment of children as victims and witnesses of crime, abuse, and violence from infancy to age 17.  The results were a wake-up call, and warning bell, for all of us.

We learned that the majority of our kids – more than 60 percent – have been exposed to crime, abuse, and violence -- many in their own homes.  Ten percent of children in our country have suffered some form of abuse or neglect; one in sixteen has been victimized sexually.  And both direct and indirect exposure to violence is having a profound negative impact on the mental and emotional development of young people across the country.

The latest and best research we have shows that children exposed to violence are more likely to go on to abuse drugs and alcohol.  They’re at greater risk of depression, anxiety, and other post-traumatic disorders.  They fail in school more often than other kids.  They’re more likely to develop chronic diseases and to have trouble forming emotional attachments.  And they’re more likely to commit acts of violence themselves.

This problem affects each one of us.  And effectively addressing it must become our shared concern and our shared cause.

Today’s Justice Department has made an historic commitment to this work.  Over the last 20 months, we have renewed and refocused efforts to serve our nation’s most vulnerable, and most distressed, children.  Components across the Department – including the offices that lead our work to combat violence against women, improve juvenile justice, support community-based policing, and assist victims of crime – are actively engaged.  We’re also bringing in partners from the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, from across every level of law enforcement, and from U.S. Attorneys’ Offices across the country.

 I’m proud that the Justice Department now is directing resources for the express purpose of reducing childhood exposure to violence, to raising awareness about its ramifications, to advancing scientific inquiry on its causes and characteristics, and, of course, to countering its negative impact.

And I’m pleased to report that, today, the Department of Justice officially launched our *Defending Childhood* initiative – a new effort focused on preventing, addressing, reducing, and more fully understanding childhood exposure to violence.

As part of this landmark initiative, we will be providing new resources to test potential solutions; and we will support organizations, programs, and strategies that prove most effective.

This afternoon, I announced more than $5 million in grants specifically to address children’s exposure to violence. Eight demonstration sites in cities and tribal communities around the country will receive a portion of these grants to develop pilot programs over the next year that further the goals of this initiative.  These investments will help to launch, sustain, and expand programs and organizations focused on the development of comprehensive, community-based solutions.  And, in the months ahead, research and evaluation of these sites will be used to enhance and inform our future work and, above all, help to ensure that – in this city and in communities across the country – all of our children have the opportunity to thrive and to fulfill their potential.

As our Defending Childhood initiative gets underway, I look forward to working with the leaders, experts, and advocates gathered here.  By your very presence tonight, and through your ongoing support of Safe Shores, you have demonstrated your commitment to solving a problem that, simply put, will determine the future course of our nation.  I share your commitment.  And I believe that, together, we can transform the city and country we love for the better – one child at a time.

Thank you.