

Response of Denise Ellen O'Donnell
Nominee to be the Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance
to the Written Questions for the Record of Senator Chuck Grassley

1. **On June 4, 1998, you spoke at a naturalization ceremony. In your remarks you stated, “as a citizen of the United States, you have the right to vote and to participate in the democratic process, but with that right, comes the duty to register and to vote in elections; the duty to support qualified candidates for public office.” Your statement concerns me. I think you crossed the line from celebratory remarks to a partisan admonition. When you delivered the speech, you were a U.S. Attorney, appointed by a Democratic President. It is likely that new citizens not fully appreciate the nuances of the role of a U.S. Attorney plays in representing the Government of the United States. I want to make sure you understand that as Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, you should not let partisanship influence any decisions you make. If confirmed, are you fully committed to carrying out your duties without regard to any political, partisan, or ideological views?**

Response: I intended to convey, through my remarks, my long held view that participation in our democracy by voting is one of the most important roles of citizenship. If I am fortunate to be confirmed as Director of BJA, I am committed to carry out my duties without regard to any political, partisan, or ideological views.

2. **How will your experience as Commissioner for New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services impact you as you take on this new responsibility, if confirmed?**

Response: My experience as Commissioner for New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services has prepared me well to serve as Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance.

As DCJS Commissioner, I oversaw a multi-service criminal justice agency with responsibility for a number of programs similar to those supported on a national level by BJA and other Office of Justice Programs components. One of my priorities was to provide leadership, training and technical assistance to state, local, and community based public safety agencies and programs, a mission very similar to the mission of BJA.

An example of one successful effort that I chaired in New York was the state re-entry task force that implemented a new statewide re-entry plan to reduce recidivism by former offenders released from New York's prisons. That experience provided me with the necessary background and experience to help lead BJA's efforts to implement the Second Chance Act and the Administration's national re-entry initiative. Another highly effective program that I expanded at DCJS was Operation Impact which encompassed the types of proven “smart policing” strategies supported by BJA.

As Director of the state administrative agency for BJA funds, I implemented effective programs to provide greater oversight over grant funds, I strengthened the internal auditing function at DCJS and expanded a Comstat-like performance monitoring program to measure the effectiveness of programs at DCJS and other public safety agencies. These experiences will hopefully enable me to provide the kind of careful oversight of federal grant funds that the Administration, Congress and the taxpayers expect, should I be confirmed.

3. **If confirmed, what will be your biggest challenges? How will you address those challenges?**

Response: What I see as the biggest challenge facing BJA is the severe financial crisis facing state and local governments which is leading to a reduction in funding for public safety programs nationwide. Across the country, funding is being reduced for police officers, prosecutors, courts, indigent defense, crime laboratories, probation officers, domestic violence programs, treatment programs and community crime reduction efforts. I am concerned about the impact this will have on public safety. The best way to address this problem is to ensure that BJA funding is directed to state, local and tribal programs with the biggest impact on public safety and to further ensure that the funds are being used wisely to support evidenced-based programs that are effective in reducing crime.

A related challenge is developing effective performance measures to measure the effectiveness of criminal justice grants and to develop workable methodologies to measure the cost of programs in relation to the benefits to public safety. While this is a challenge, it is also an extraordinary opportunity to develop more effective criminal justice programs and strategies that will make our communities safer in the long run.

What goals will you set for the first year on the job?

Response: If confirmed as Director of BJA, my goals for the first year are:

- To administer BJA's grant awards process in a fair, effective and transparent manner that avoids waste, fraud and abuse.
- To support programs which provide innovation and promote information sharing in law enforcement (i.e., Smart Policing Initiative, The Regional Information Sharing Strategy (RISS), the National Suspicious Activity Initiative (NSI), the Public Safety Officer Benefits (PSOB) program and the Attorney General's officer safety initiative to reduce line of duty deaths and injuries).
- To work with state, local and tribal partners to replicate evidence-based public safety programs and strategies that work and to transfer knowledge about effective programs throughout the criminal justice system.

4. Please describe with particularity the process by which these questions were answered.

Response: The questions from Senator Grassley were forwarded to me by the Office of Legislative Affairs of the U.S. Department of Justice by e-mail on April 6, 2011. I drafted my answers after careful consideration of the questions. I then discussed some of my answers with representatives from the U.S. Department of Justice who are assisting me in the nomination process. I prepared my final responses to these questions thereafter.

6. Do these answers reflect your true and personal views?

Response: Yes.