

Swearing-In Remarks of Attorney General Matthew Denn
Tuesday, January 6, 2015

Thank you to Valerie Swanson, Apostle Weeks, Trawana James Taylor, President Judge Jurden, and all of you for taking the time to be here today. Governor Markell, my friend for many years and I hope for many more to come, thank you for being here today. The last time you and I were in this building together, you were playing some overaggressive defense against a 14-year-old point guard in an elected officials-versus-kids charity basketball game. I hope our work together ends better than the game did. My mom and dad and sister and a number of other relatives are here, thank you for coming. And first and foremost, thanks to my wife and boys for letting me do this work. I was sworn in for my first elected office ten years ago in my living room, with my friend Joe and my dog Lenny as the only witnesses, before rejoining Michele to watch over Adam and Zach at the Christiana Hospital NICU. The boys were five days old. And now, ten years later, they are extraordinary people – hard working, respectful, and kind, except to one another. They are that way in large part because of my wife Michele. Everyone knows that she is gorgeous. Everyone assumes that she is patient, because she has to deal with me. But no one other than me gets to see her molding these boys into the great kids they are. I love all of you very much, and I am grateful that you have adjusted your lives to let me do this work that is so important.

In 2004, the year Adam and Zach were born, the FBI reported that there were 17 murders and non-negligent homicides in Delaware. In 2013, the FBI reported 39 – more than double. 2014 looks to have been just as bad. Behind the numbers are real people. Jason Turner, 32, shot dead by a teenager during a robbery attempt at 8th and Pine Streets, a five minute drive from here in June. Crystal Brown, 43 years old, shot dead in the crossfire of a gunfight on a street corner last July when she came out of a grocery store. These are not statistics, these were fathers, mothers, sons and daughters, who are lost to us and their families forever because people who should never have had guns senselessly shot them.

Violent crime may be concentrated in certain areas of our state, but it affects our whole state. When businesses don't want to come here or stay here because of our violent crime rate, it affects all of us. When many of our state's children can't excel in school because they return home to neighborhoods full of chaos and despair, it affects all of us. Drug trafficking and the violence that so often accompanies it has found its way into every corner of our state. And even if violent crime didn't affect all of us, addressing it would be the right thing to do. Because people in every neighborhood of this state, rich or poor, have a right to live free of fear.

This is not going to be a long speech because when it comes to this problem of violent crime in our state, there has already been a lot of talk. Delawareans know that violent crime won't disappear from our streets overnight, they don't expect that. But they do expect action and a sense of urgency from their elected officials. An urgency that does not wax and wane with the prior week's headlines. It is time to get some things done.

For years I have heard that we need more police officers patrolling the streets of our most dangerous neighborhoods on foot. The harsh reality is that several of those neighborhoods are within a five minute drive from where we sit today. And yet when I drive through those

neighborhoods at night, there is not a police officer to be seen. Today we set about changing that. I have presented to the City of Wilmington's elected leaders a proposal to apply jointly with my office for \$650,000 from the state's Neighborhood Building Blocks Fund to pay for six additional foot patrol officers to walk the streets of Wilmington's most dangerous neighborhoods at night from March 1 through the end of the summer. Officers from the New Castle County and Delaware State Police would help the city's police provide coverage for the patrols and provide advice on tactics. Six officers can and will have an impact on violent crime. It is real action that can put police on the streets where they are needed. The county is ready to help, the state is ready to help, so when the city signs the application, we can put in motion a plan to give the people of this city's most dangerous neighborhoods the added police protection that they have rightfully demanded.

In the coming weeks, Delawareans will see that our actions will not be limited to putting visible law enforcement officers in our most violent communities. Working with our General Assembly we will be moving quickly to create a legal framework where violent offenders who illegally carry guns face sure punishment, and are not turned back out onto our streets to engage in more mayhem. That should be true for teenagers and adults – juveniles are different from adults to be sure, but being seventeen is not a free pass to hurt other people or carry guns. And we will be moving swiftly to provide our communities with the means to lift their neighbors up. To provide help for children to learn and stay out of trouble. To help those members of our communities who have fallen to have a real second chance when they come out of our corrections system to lead productive lives within the law. To recognize substance abuse as the statewide crisis that it is, and to devote the resources to it worthy of a crisis of its magnitude. These efforts to lift up young people, to help repair fractured souls, to help break the chains of addiction, will be priorities for the Delaware Department of Justice, both because it's the smart way to deal with crime, and because we believe that human lives are precious and human potential is limitless.

I am not going to promise how quickly we will reduce the violence, because I simply don't know and it's not entirely in my hands. But I do know this. There will be no mistaking our focus, no mistaking our determination, no mistaking our unshakeable commitment. Those that look to be partners in our efforts will find us to be stalwart allies; those who defend the status quo will not.

The mission of the Department of Justice extends far beyond violent crime. It protects some of our most vulnerable citizens – children, seniors, Delawareans with disabilities. It advocates for consumers, everyone from investors to owners of manufactured homes to people who purchase consumer goods. It represents our state agencies, and when necessary investigates wrongdoing by government officials at all levels. In each of these areas, my goals are very simple: excellence and integrity. I want our office to be the standard by which Attorney General offices throughout the country are measured. Over the last several weeks, I've tried to meet almost every one of the over 400 employees of the Department face to face, and after doing so, I am supremely confident that our office is capable of being the finest in America. The men and women of the Department of Justice I have met are smart, capable, and dedicated to the public they serve. I am proud to call them my colleagues.

Finally, my roll of colleagues extends far beyond the walls of the Department of Justice. It includes our front-line law enforcement officers, who put their own lives on the line every day.

It includes clergy and community activists who are eager to roll up their sleeves and help end the violence that afflicts neighborhoods about which they care deeply. And it includes lawmakers from all parts of the state and both sides of the aisle, proud Democrats like Senate President Patricia Blevins and Senator Margaret Rose Henry in whose district we sit today, and proud Republicans like my friends Senators Brian Pettyjohn and Ernie Lopez, who made a three hour round trip from Sussex County to be here today because they care about this state. To fix this problem, we will all need to work together. We do not walk alone.

Ten years from now, what I say today won't matter. What will matter is what we do in the weeks and months to come. We will be judged by our actions. Did we put aside ego and politics to do the things we all know must be done? Did we do what was needed to secure for this state's children the opportunities that we received, the opportunities that are their birthright? Were we our brothers' keepers? Together, we can set this state on the right course, a course that will allow our neighbors to live in peace and security, and all this state's children to have the opportunity to live out their dreams. If we do the right things. Our work begins today.