

This transcript has been edited for clarity and brevity.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Welcome to *Justice Today*, the official podcast at the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, where we shine a light on cutting-edge research and practices and offer an in-depth look at what we're doing to meet the biggest public safety challenges of our time. Join us as we explore how funding, science, and technology help us achieve strong communities.

I'm your host, Karen Friedman. I'm Director of Criminal Justice Innovation, Development, and Engagement at OJP's Bureau of Justice Assistance, otherwise known as BJA.

Our guest today, Karhlton Moore, is a nationally recognized expert in the field of criminal justice policy. Karhlton is a lawyer, a former Assistant Attorney General in the state of Ohio, and for almost two decades served as Executive Director of the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services, where he oversaw and implemented programs designed to improve all aspects of law enforcement and public safety.

In February, Karhlton was appointed Director of this agency, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and is now in charge of the nation's largest portfolio of criminal justice grant programs. Karhlton is here to share with us some of the lessons he has learned during his career in criminal justice and some of what he hopes to accomplish here at BJA. Welcome to *Justice Today*, Karhlton. Thank you so much for being here with me.

KARHLTON MOORE: Karen, it's such a pleasure to be here with you today. I've had the opportunity to listen to your work, and I've enjoyed listening to the other podcasts you've done. So, I've really been looking forward to this opportunity to sit down and talk to you.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Oh, thank you. I appreciate that. Karhlton, you bring a really unique perspective to the job of BJA Director since, for more than 18 years, you worked with state and local governments in Ohio implementing the federal grant programs that you now oversee. Let's start by telling our audience a little bit about your personal background and how you got interested in criminal justice policy.

KARHLTON MOORE: Okay, so I'll start with my family. I was born one of five kids, right in the middle, so older brother, older sister, younger brother, younger sister, and that's the family that my mom and dad had together. My dad was married once before, so I have three siblings from that marriage also. The odd thing, one interesting thing about our family, I'm sure you've seen already the odd way my name is spelled with that "h" in there. And I often say that "h" refers to "hell," as to "What the hell is an 'h' doing in the name 'Karhlton'?" And, I mean, that thing gets thrown all over the place. But my mother, she just had this thing for spelling names in just the strangest ways. So...

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Are you all K's? Are you like the Kardashians?

KARHLTON MOORE: We are all K's, which I've always thought is an odd thing for an African-American family to have an affinity for the letter "k." But, you know, my oldest brother, Kacie, is spelled K-A-C-I-E, and then there was my sister Kame, Kamarough, K-A-M-A-R-O-U-G-H.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Oh, wow.

KARHLTON MOORE: Karhla, who's right after me, is "K-A-R-H-L-A," and then my youngest brother, Kreighton, who passed some time ago.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Oh, I'm sorry.

KARHLTON MOORE: K-R-E-I-G-H-T-E-N. So just an odd, odd way to spell names.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: There you go. Okay,

KARHLTON MOORE: But, you know, the one thing my parents were, besides very interesting names, they were really focused on education, despite the fact that neither of them graduated from college. My mom started college for a very short period of time and then moved back home. My dad never went to college, but they were so focused on "We need to get our education."

So my brother Kacie, he joined the Marines, and he retired from the Marines. But my sister Kame, she went and graduated from college. She also got her master's degree. I obviously went to college, got my law degree. My sister Karhla went to college also. She graduated with her degree. And my younger brother, Kreighton, he went to college also and graduated with his degree. So that was kind of the path forward in my family, and it was very much an expectation that we would go to college, and that we would try to do something important with our lives.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Interesting. And you chose law school because why?

KARHLTON MOORE: You know, I don't know why. When I was very young, I just knew I wanted to be an attorney. And I really thought I would end up being a prosecutor. That was the path that I thought I would go down, and almost went down that path. But I got into law school. I was into criminal justice. I was a member of the Criminal Law Society. I took all the criminal justice courses I could take when I was in law school. And had internships when I was in law school. They're all focused on criminal justice.

Then when I got out, I was looking for — well, actually, when I was still in law school, all the jobs that I was primarily interested in, they're prosecutors' offices. I almost ended up at a number of prosecutors' offices. Thought very hard about those offers. The one I really, really thought I was going to do was move to Cook County and work at the prosecutor's office in Chicago. I was interested in Chicago, New York, Miami, and other places. But then I got an offer from the Ohio Attorney General's Office. I had interned there for a period of time, in between, I think, my second and third year, and so I

decided that upon graduation, I would move back to Ohio. I went to law school here in D.C. and moved back to Ohio and started at Ohio Attorney General's Office.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Oh. So when you headed the Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services, you worked directly with state and local agencies that were implementing federal grants. Are there any particular success stories from Ohio that stand out in your mind that you want to share? And are there lessons that you've learned in the field that you want to bring to BJA?

KARHLTON MOORE: You know, I learned a lot of lessons. I think in terms of success, there are a number of programs I can talk about. But the biggest thing that I learned at my time at the Office of Criminal Justice Services is the importance of partnership, the importance of showing up, of giving people your word, and sticking to it. When you can do something, tell them that you can. When you can't do something, tell them that you can't. People will respect that.

I cannot tell you how many times, while I was in state government, I would get a call from someone who had talked to someone else in state government and they felt like they weren't getting a straight answer. And they would say, "Hey, is this going to happen or not?" And so often, I would tell them, "No, that's not going to happen." People really respected that. And I think they enjoyed that. And I don't know another way of doing business. Even now, so many people who I worked with all those years in Ohio still reach out to me.

In terms of particular programs that I'm most proud of, it's hard to narrow it down, but I'll go with just a couple. One is the Ohio Consortium of Crime Science. This is a partnership between the Office of Criminal Justice Services and colleges and universities around the state of Ohio with expertise in criminal justice policy and practice. We created the consortium on the basis of the old agricultural extension centers. Basically, if you grew wheat and one day you decided you want to grow corn, you could call up the extension center and they would explain to you how to grow corn or how to grow wheat, or whatever the case might be.

We set this up in a way that any type of agency — law enforcement, prosecutors' office, judges, victim services, reentry, whatever the case may be — they can reach out to the Office of Criminal Justice Services and say, "I'm having a problem with burglaries. I'm having an issue with group and gang violence." And we had a group of folks who would look, they would scour things around the country, identify a best practice or an evidence-based practice. And then we would send someone to that jurisdiction to implement it and evaluate the work that was done.

Part of that was because, you know, you have agencies who are in larger jurisdictions who might have access to researchers and funding that other agencies don't have. The idea that the type of criminal justice you get access to is dependent upon where you just happen to live, that's a sad reality. This was one way that we could address this, by

making sure that no matter where you live, you can have access to the best experts that our state had to offer.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: That's awesome.

KARHLTON MOORE: The other one I'll mention is the Ohio Community Initiative to Reduce Violence. This was a partnership between a number of cities in Ohio to utilize focused deterrence to build collaborations between communities, law enforcement, and social service providers to attack gang and group homicides. It was incredibly successful. So many cities across Ohio who implemented this strategy saw significant reductions in gang and group homicide. One city actually went an entire year without a single homicide.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Wow.

KARHLTON MOORE: When you're in a place for 17 years, it's hard to narrow it down. But right after that, I would say the Ohio Collaborative Community Police Advisory Board. Those three things are probably the things that I'm most proud of.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: They sound amazing. And things that sound like we need to be spreading around the country.

KARHLTON MOORE: Absolutely. Absolutely. I just talked this morning with another group of folks. We're going to do our best here.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: I know you've been here since February. I know at the beginning it was very much like drinking water out of a firehose. But you've had a little bit of time to get to know the agency. Have you thought about some of your priorities that you'd like to focus on as Director?

KARHLTON MOORE: There are a number of things that I'm most interested in. Part of that is because of just the time that we're in. For me, one of the benefits of being at a place like the Office of Criminal Justice Services and BJA is that you don't have to pick, right? You don't have to say, "Well, I'm only interested in police, or I'm only interested in reentry, or I'm only interested in prosecution. I'm only interested in correction." You have the ability to impact all aspects of the criminal justice system. Different times or different aspects of the criminal justice system will require special attention because of the time that you're in. You know, a former judge, how interconnected all of this stuff really is.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: For sure.

KARHLTON MOORE: You can be focused on law enforcement initiative. And then someone comes out of a corrections facility, and they completely change the dynamics in a particular community. So you have to be mindful of all of those things. But obviously, what's going on across the country, I'm very focused on violent crime right

now, and what we can do to get more evidence-based practices engaged all across the country.

But the biggest thing that I'm interested in is, when I first became a State Agency Administrator, BJA was the leader. They're the leader in criminal justice policy development, in criminal justice practice, and obviously, in funding. I think one thing that we have to do in order to make our resources — and when I say resources, I mean all of it. Not just money. People oftentimes just think about money, but I'm talking about policy development, and technical assistance, and training, and all the things that you need in order to be successful. We've got to resume that leadership mantle.

That means engaging in things like what we're doing right now. That means going about the country and making sure people know that we are here as their partners, that they can lean on us, and that they can count on us. That means developing good products. And we have to do that. These are all things that we have to get done. We're going to have a focus on law enforcement right now because of issues that we're dealing with with violent crime. But overall, really, my entire thing is we've got to resume that leadership mantle, because BJA is the one place, the one place in this country that will go anywhere and everywhere.

We're interested in moving some communities from A to B, where some people aren't interested in moving a community from A to B. We're interested in getting a community from Y to Z, and everything in between, as they are on their own criminal justice journey. I think we are uniquely positioned now to do that because we have that knowledge and expertise here. But we also have the funding here. So that's really what my focus is on right now.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Right. Because of your experience in Ohio, you're very familiar with BJA. You had worked for a long time with BJA. But every new job brings along something different, its own challenges and surprises. So besides the fact that you have a pain-in-the-butt former judge to work with, have you encountered any surprises since coming to BJA?

KARHLTON MOORE: It's a pleasant surprise. I've got to tell you, I don't care if you were a judge for a day or for 20 years like you, Karen. It has been "Your Honor." It has been "Judge." It's hard to make myself say "Karen." But in terms of surprises, I've worked with BJA for a long time, but there have been surprises. Two I'll mention. One is, even having been in criminal justice for so long, oh my God, the acronyms that you're reading at the Department of Justice.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Oh my goodness, totally.

KARHLTON MOORE: It was mind-blowing at times. And you sit in these meetings, and you hear this stuff, and I'll say to someone, "What is that? I don't know what you're talking about. I've never heard this before." And I've been here for like three weeks.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: They might as well be talking Chinese.

KARHLTON MOORE: Exactly.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Yeah.

KARHLTON MOORE: I've had some people go through an entire paragraph where the only actual words were articles, you know.

The biggest single surprise that I really didn't know anything about — and I've been pleasantly, pleasantly surprised — that's the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program. This is an area I didn't know anything about. And I...

KAREN FRIEDMAN: And it has an acronym as well, PSOB.

KARHLTON MOORE: I'm sitting in these meetings. We were talking about PSOB, PSOB. Fine, what is PSOB, right? And it is incredible. It's incredible. It's one of those things that provides resources to public safety officers who have been disabled, or they've died, so it provides resources to families. This is a role that I didn't know that BJA had. But I'm glad that it does.

We're certainly looking at ways to expand the types of benefits that we can provide to the field and we can provide to families and to officers who either are injured while doing this incredibly dangerous work on our behalf or those who lose their lives while doing this work on our behalf. I think we need to make sure that officers and their families know they matter to all of us. And PSOB is one way that we can do that.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Well, that segues perfectly into my next question. We all know how difficult these past few years have been. And they've been especially challenging as well at times for law enforcement agencies across the country. So, you want to tell our listeners a little bit about how BJA grants are helping police departments develop new programs and approaches to address these new challenges?

KARHLTON MOORE: Yeah, absolutely. There are a number of resources that we have in place, and there are some other resources throughout the federal government. I always make a point of talking about a couple of programs that aren't really BJA's. But I feel like it's our responsibility to provide leadership and information to the field about what's going on in these particular areas.

First of all, to our VALOR Program. VALOR is one way that we focus on officer wellness, resiliency, and safety. They're not grants, but they're training and technical assistance and research where we send people out to help agencies develop policies and strategies to make sure that their officers are well mentally, as well as physically. All the other things that we talk about doing where police are a foundation — if your foundation isn't strong and sound, then you're not going to have a very successful

system. So we need to make sure that our police officers are being taken care of in that way. VALOR is one way that we do that.

The other things I want to mention, you mentioned how it's been difficult in the last couple of years. So, there's work that we need to do in hiring and recruiting. One of the things — I didn't talk about this earlier — you asked me about things I was most proud of. But in Ohio, we created an office of law enforcement recruitment. I was so pleased to be able to hire Sarah Shendy to be our state's first ever head of that office. That office's focus is on expanding the interest of people to get into law enforcement.

There are people who never see themselves as a potential police officer. But I've talked to a number of people who ended up in policing and made a career out of it. And they've shared with me that the reason they got into policing was because someone they respect had asked them about it. They're just saying, "Hey, I think you'd make a great police officer. Do you have any interest in doing that?" So, there's a couple of programs that we created. One is the College to Law Enforcement Pathway Project. It's a partnership between law enforcement and colleges and universities. We started with one of our historically Black colleges. And we're actually going to replicate this program at BJA. We have something out on the street right now to try to find a technical assistance provider to work with historically Black colleges and universities to help increase the ranks of minorities in policing.

The other thing I want to mention is the 30x30 Project. This is something I'm so excited about. I actually was at a conference recently, and then we had the same folks speak at our PSP meeting. That's Mau McGough, and she's one of the cofounders of the 30x30, and then professor and former chief Roman from Newark. They developed the 30x30. And that is by the year 2030, to have 30 percent of the recruits be women. This is something that we really need to do for a whole host of reasons.

I can go through a number of reasons why it makes sense to invest in women in policing, from the fact that they're going to cost you less money in the long run, that they're going to engage in fewer uses of force. They're going to engage in fewer legitimate uses of force. There's just a whole host of ways that women can be incredibly helpful. But even beyond that, we need to diversify the ranks of police. We're at 12 percent. We've been at 12 percent women in policing for like 40 years.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Wow, wow.

KARHLTON MOORE: So we're really happy to push that number up. Because every single person living in this country ought to be able to look at their policing agency and see someone who looks just like them.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: All right.

KARHLTON MOORE: I think this is something that we really need to focus on as an organization. We need to develop strategies to figure out how we can be more

supportive of the 30x30 Project. The other thing I'll mention is ARPA, the American Rescue Plan Act. It's out there. It is a tool that more and more states and communities need to take advantage of to address some of the issues that we've talked about today from hiring and recruitment, which you can use ARPA to pay it for, to officer wellness, from combating violent crime to investments in CVI, community violence intervention. You see, I almost slipped into just using the acronyms myself.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Yeah, there you go.

KARHLTON MOORE: These are things that there is money for right now. I mean, Karen, this is the single largest investment in criminal justice in my career. We've got to make sure that people in the criminal justice field are taking advantage of this opportunity. Because once that money is gone, it's gone. And then people are going to sit around and say, "Well, I need money for this, and I need money for that." Well, you have money to do all of those things, and you got to get in there and fight for that money.

The other resource that we have out there, of course, is the Justice Assistance Grant Program. And this was my favorite grant, when I was in SAA, when I was the head of the State Administering Agency, because JAG gives you the ability to not only start an entire program, but if there are gaps in an existing program, you can plug JAG into it. As a matter of fact, at one time, the Justice Assistance Grant Program had started more drug courts in this country than the Drug Court Grant Program had started. You can use JAG for hiring and recruitment. You can use it for wellness. You can use it for CVI. You can use it for building collaborations between law enforcement and community. You can use it to address issues in drug courts, in reentry courts, in other types of specialty dockets.

You can use it for purposes of evaluation to get academic partners. I think its versatility makes it very difficult to measure. But where the rubber meets the road, it makes it incredibly, incredibly useful. So JAG is another tool that we make available to the field to be able to determine how best to meet their criminal justice needs.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: That's awesome advice to everyone who's listening. Because, like you said, the money is there and people need to utilize it. I know you've been talking about that since I met you: "We've got to get people to use that ARPA money." So that's great. I hope everyone's listening to that. I know another project that BJA has underway, and one that you're very enthusiastic about, is the National Police Knowledge Lab, which we announced a few weeks ago in California. You want to talk a little bit about the Knowledge Lab and what makes it unique and how it's going to help improve law enforcement and public safety around the country?

KARHLTON MOORE: Absolutely. As a matter of fact, I just got off a call about the Knowledge Lab. I was speaking at the American Society of Evidence-based Practices and had a chance to talk about the Knowledge Lab with our partners there who are involved with the Knowledge Lab.

The Knowledge Lab, in one sentence, is a one-stop shop where any agency across the country can get guidance on constitutional policing. The Department of Justice, over the course of the last 40 years, has learned an awful lot about what makes good policing, and how agencies can get themselves into trouble and how they can get out of trouble. Previously, in order to access that information, you really needed to do something that you wouldn't be very proud of.

Now the Department has decided to be incredibly proactive. And that is to build this Knowledge Lab so that everyone can learn the lessons of consent decrees and other things to develop the best practices. If you look around the country, you see some agencies who are doing incredible things right now, who are doing constitutional policing in a way that everyone would be proud of. They've been through consent decree. They've been through it, and so they've learned lessons from it. So this is really a proactive way to get that knowledge and information out there.

There's more that we think the Knowledge Lab will do. It can provide training. It can provide on-demand consulting. So, if you're an agency struggling with something, you can contact the Knowledge Lab, and they can guide you in the right direction. And the thing that I really love about it, Karen, is very similar to what I talked about when I was talking about the Ohio Consortium of Crime Science — that it allows agencies regardless of size, regardless of geography, regardless of what the community looks like, regardless of the resources that are available in that community — it allows everyone access to this information. Everyone can have onsite technical assistance.

We're still at the very early stages of the Knowledge Lab, and we're trying to work through some of the logistical things that come along with how do you deliver these services, and how do things that aren't necessarily constitutional, what do you do about those types of things. But I'm really excited about the potential of the Knowledge Lab.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: And the potential for benefit to smaller agencies that have such limited resources. It'll all be right there for them.

KARHLTON MOORE: Absolutely. And you know what happens when an agency is seen as legitimate? It helps on the criminal justice side. It helps with the community side. It helps with community relations. The better that relationship is between law enforcement and the community, the safer the police officers are, the safer the people in the community are. If they can build that partnership, I think the Knowledge Lab can go a long way in assisting communities and law enforcement agencies in making better relationships and building better relationships and establishing mutual trust and respect.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Yeah, that's wonderful. I know another project that's of particular interest to you is Project Safe Neighborhoods, or the acronym, PSN. I know that you and Attorney General Garland recently addressed a national summit of hundreds of law enforcement officials that was part of PSN. You want to tell our listeners a little bit about what Project Safe Neighborhoods is and what work it's doing?

KARHLTON MOORE: Yeah, so Project Safe Neighborhoods. I had the great fortune of administering the Project Safe Neighborhoods Program on behalf of the U.S. Attorney's Offices in Ohio, both the Northern District and Southern District U.S. Attorney's Offices. Project Safe Neighborhoods is funding. It's really focused on gun crimes. But it goes out to the 94 U.S. Attorney's Offices around the country. And the great thing about it is they build collaborations with community partners. That's always been one of my favorite things about the PSN project, is that building of the relationship.

We recently had a summit where I had an opportunity to talk to the offices to share some of my experience in seeing what PSN can really do. Because it can do some pretty amazing things when everyone gets focused and gets on the same page, and you build these collaborations that everyone can agree to. What we tried to do recently was to bring experts to the table to share some of the best practices we know of around the country and ways to address certain types of crime issues. There's a lot of interest right now, especially in juvenile crime. I'm sure you saw that...

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Yeah. Sure.

KARHLTON MOORE: ...one. But things like CVI and other...

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Community Violence Intervention.

KARHLTON MOORE: Community Violence Intervention. So, yeah, I'm doing it too. It was a 2-day conference. We went from 12:00 to 5:00 each day. The Department was so incredibly supportive. You have the Attorney General present. You have the Deputy Attorney General, the Associate Attorney General. I had a chance to present. Amy Solomon presented. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to do some internal work for the Department. I'm looking forward to some of the things that some of the PSN partners across the country put into practice as a result of the PSN Summit.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Yeah, it's a great, great project. Another thing that BJA recognizes is extraordinary acts of heroism and bravery by law enforcement officers through our Public Safety Officer Medal of Valor every year. We just had that presentation at the White House last week. I was hoping that you can tell our listeners a little bit about that program.

KARHLTON MOORE: This is an area that I think we need to talk more about. This is also another part of that PSOB Office that I didn't know about. I've heard of the Medal of Valor, but I didn't know that it was a part of the work of BJA. It recognizes people who do incredible things, incredible things that are often taken for granted. Sometimes we don't really hear about, and sometimes you hear about these things that people do. You can't help but be impressed. You cannot help but be impressed.

We honored two classes of Medal of Valor winners. It's a really nice event. I unfortunately had COVID, so my first visit to the White House, I was not able to go. I'm a

little disappointed about that. But, obviously, it wasn't about me. It was about those public safety officers being honored for their service by the Department of Justice, by the Attorney General, and certainly by the President.

The thing that I want, I want to see more people nominated. I want to see more agencies and organizations across the country nominate people for these incredible acts of courage that they engage in. So I'm looking forward to next year. It was great this year because it happened during Police Week. We were able to honor those folks, and bring them to D.C., and we pay to bring them to D.C. and then pay to bring a family member along with them. We pick them up at their hotel and drive them to the White House, and they get an opportunity to be in the White House and get to know that we, as a Department, as the federal government, appreciate so much the services that they're providing.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: That's really special.

KARHLTON MOORE: Yeah.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Well, we're almost out of time. But I want to make clear to our listeners that a lot of our conversation today was really focused on law enforcement. But I want to make sure that everyone who's listening knows that BJA is focused on many, many issues. Basically, anything that impacts the criminal justice system is in our repertoire, and what we deal with — everything from reentry to crime, to violence intervention, to any kind of diversion courts, drug courts, diversion programs, issues going on in the correctional system. Just anything that affects and impacts the criminal justice system is in our wheelhouse. It's really such a large array of topics that we cover.

I know when I came into BJA, it was just amazing to me how much they do and how committed everybody is who works at BJA. They're so committed to their portfolios, and they're so committed to really attempting to make transformative change when it comes to criminal justice. I'm sure you're seeing that as well, Karhlton, right?

KARHLTON MOORE: Absolutely. The people here are so incredibly knowledgeable and so dedicated. Karen, you're exactly right. BJA is more than about supporting law enforcement. It's a really important constituency, and we will always support law enforcement. But BJA is about the entire criminal justice system.

Fifty-nine different grant programs this year. Over \$1.2 billion will flow from BJA out into the field. It will touch every issue, from deflection and prevention and education at the front of the system, to corrections and reentry on the back end of the system. The people who work on each of those things on behalf of BJA, it is the most important thing in the world to them. I can't tell you how incredibly blessed I feel to have such an amazing staff of dedicated people, including our host here today.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: Thank you.

KARHLTON MOORE: To have them focused on all types of issues. I was on today talking about information sharing. All of these issues, if it impacts the criminal justice system, it's important to BJA, and someone here is working on it.

KAREN FRIEDMAN: So true. I've seen it firsthand. Karhlton Moore, we appreciate you taking time out of your exceptionally busy schedule to speak with me today. Thank you for this great conversation. I know that everyone who listened has learned something today, and I look forward to continuing to work with you and doing great things together to help people and to make some transformative, impactful positive changes to our criminal justice system. Thank you for all that you do.

KARHLTON MOORE: Thank you so much, Karen.

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