



## Transcript: Justice Matters – Saving Drug-Endangered Children, Part 2: An Interview With Commander Lori Moriarty

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Justice Podcast Series is designed to provide the latest information in justice innovations, practices, and perspectives from the field of criminal justice. In this edition, Rebecca Rose, BJA Policy Advisor, continues her conversation with Commander Lori Moriarty of the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children (National DEC) about some of the resources that are available to state, local, and tribal communities to combat the issue of drug-endangered children.

**Rebecca Rose:** Hello, friends and colleagues. This is Rebecca Rose for the Bureau of Justice Assistance and welcome to another edition of BJA's Justice Podcast Series. In this podcast, we return to our conversation with Commander Lori Moriarty of the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children to continue our discussion on the issue of drug-endangered children. Today we will begin talking about the [Obama] Administration's support for this important issue and discuss some of the resources that are available to state, local, and tribal communities that are looking to be more involved in combating these cases.

[Lori], you've talked a lot about awareness and how important that is and institutionalizing this at the local level between law enforcement and social services and there has been quite a bit of attention on this issue and related issues by the [Obama] Administration recently. For example, in the 2010 Drug Control Strategy, the Office of National Drug Control Strategy, otherwise known as ONDCP, identified a need to support the creation of a drug-endangered children infrastructure at the federal level with the hopes to increase the capacity development at the state, local, and tribal levels. As a result of the strategy, a new interagency Task Force on Drug Endangered Children has been formed to support the identification of model protocols, programming, and best practices to assist governments in identifying, responding to, and providing services for drug-endangered children. And the ultimate goal for the Department of Justice, which is leading up this interagency task force and its federal partners who are very heavily involved from the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education, is to help state, local, and tribal stakeholders to rescue, protect, and serve the most vulnerable victims of drug-related crimes, of course.

Now, BJA has been actively involved in this task force and, through the work that you do at the National Alliance for Drug

Endangered Children, has brought many of these issues and the good work already being done in the field to the forefront of this task force, which is a great opportunity, at least from the [Obama] Administration level, to raise awareness of this issue. And then in addition, in September 2010, Attorney General Eric Holder officially unveiled "Defending Childhood," which is a new Department of Justice initiative focused on addressing children's exposure to violence. The goals of the initiative are to prevent children's exposure to violence as victims and witnesses, mitigate the negative effects experienced by children exposed to violence, and develop knowledge about and increase awareness of this issue. Obviously, [the issue of] drug-endangered children plays very nicely into this new initiative by the Attorney General.

Now, Lori, with the attention of the [Obama] Administration on this issue of drug-endangered children and children's exposure to violence combined with the many locally driven efforts that are happening, what are your thoughts on how we can institutionalize this awareness and response? And you talked a little bit about that [previously], but in thinking about the Administration's attention and the efforts that are happening at the local level, you know, it is about institutionalizing awareness and our response at federal, state, local, [and] tribal levels. So can you share some thoughts about how we can do a better job of making those connections?

**Commander Lori Moriarty:** Well, I think one of the key parts of having the federal interagency drug-endangered children task force becoming in existence was all of the partners that came to the table at the federal level. You know, a lot of times, the left-hand doesn't know what the right-hand is doing. I mean, we are all busy, we are all in our silos, we are all focused on our own roles and responsibilities. And so that has always been one of the things [that] we have tried to break down in the drug-endangered children effort along the way is that we are all in our silos, we all have our responsibilities, but we have to see the bigger picture together. What knowledge do I have that helps you in your work, and what knowledge do you have that helps me? And so for us, when the federal interagency task force was created and brought all of those different disciplines and partners to the table, it was one more huge piece of success for spreading the awareness. That there are other people that are doing like-kind of responses that can make both efforts better.

So let's just talk about the domestic violence situation and just the children living in violent situations overall. All of the drug-endangered children are subject to these exact same environments. If illegal substances or substance abuse is in a home, there's a high probability that domestic violence is in the home. There's a high probability, which is why you see when law enforcement raids a house that we use extra protection, so that these children are exposed to violent situations, potential kidnapping situations. Drug dealing is a violent situation, and so these children are all part of that dynamic. And as I mentioned earlier in this interview, "children see, children do." If that's the environment that they live in and that's the environment that they know, that's the environment that they model. They do the same thing, which is why we have children ending up in the criminal justice system or becoming substance abusers themselves.

So, the federal interagency task force really strengthens the local efforts by recognizing that the issue is out there. Sometimes you feel like you are just working alone and isolated on an effort that you are so passionately caring about, but there's no policy leaders at the top that can help you grow your effort, or if you're the practitioner in the field, which is where the drug-endangered children efforts came from—you're the practitioner in the field, you don't feel empowered to change policy and procedures, you can only empower how you respond, and so you [feel that you] can do a much better job yourself. But it takes the policy people to look at what's happening in the field and say, "Wow, what that commander in Iowa or Arkansas or California did is really good and we support that, and we would like to see if it's showing good evidence of success so that we can help them replicate those efforts." I think what would really be nice is if the interagency task force already sees the infrastructure, that interestingly enough most of the people that are involved in the task force helped put together the infrastructure of the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children, and so if they can then support the work that we are trying to do to get into the tribes, to get into the local communities, I think that will be where we will find our most successes. We are all stronger together.

**Rebecca Rose:** Great, Lori, I appreciate your perspective on that. It's very helpful. So you just mentioned tribes and we've mentioned tribes a little bit throughout this conversation. Can you just talk with me briefly about how you see tribal communities in particular, how they are impacted by this issue, and any ideas about what we can do to better support tribal communities around drug-endangered children?

**Commander Lori Moriarty:** I think one of the key things for us that we are looking at is taking the curriculum that we've developed and using the model. We can't use the same curriculum because it really needs to come from within the tribes, but to support the tribes and helping them develop a curriculum that will work for them, that we can get in and through the tribal leaders, that they can train people within the tribes to be trainers for them and then take the message. National DEC created a training curriculum and to date we have trained 75 trainers across the nation, and within the next couple of months we'll have 25 more. So we'll have 100 trainers who then can go out and train thousands of people to get that word out there. So if we can do the same kind of thing with the tribes and make it very tribal-specific and hit

their values and their points and then get tribal representatives to train within the tribes, I think that that will—and then also help them build the infrastructure like I talked about, to go back to the resources—to support the work that they get started within their tribes. So it needs to be very tribal-driven. And I think that the thing that we can offer them are the lessons learned that we've had as we've gone through the last 15 years of the drug-endangered children movement so that they don't have to reinvent any of those wheels.

**Rebecca Rose:** Great. Thank you, Lori. So it has been reported recently that domestic meth [methamphetamine] lab production is increasing again in many states. In fact, in just the last week [early March 2011] we've seen reports out of West Virginia, Kentucky, and Indiana. A lot of the Midwest and mid-Atlantic and southern states are showing that the meth labs continue to go up. Now, while we know this and you've mentioned this before that the drug-endangered children effort is not only about finding children in meth labs, we also know that more meth labs means more children exposed to hazardous conditions and drug use and abuse.

So you've talked a little bit about your DEC core training, but can you talk a little bit more about that and what other resources are available for state and local and tribal communities who want to raise awareness and establish some sort of coordinated responses to drug-endangered children?

**Commander Lori Moriarty:** Well, the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children actually has several resources that can support the efforts. As I've mentioned, having an infrastructure that leverages our resources is key. And when I say that, what I mean is that if you're going to go do the core DEC training and you're going to have 100 trainers across the nation who are then going to get to thousands of people within the grassroots, if you don't give them somewhere to go for support, then you can have a hundred efforts going in a hundred different directions. One thing that makes the drug-endangered children alliance and the efforts and the movement so strong is the coordinated activity together—that we're all speaking the same language, like we mentioned earlier, that we're all talking about the same definition, that we all recognize [that] children living in these environments is an at-risk situation that we should intervene in before it becomes a critical incident such as, you know, I use the example of, you know, when you're a parent. If you see your child getting ready to go cross the street, you know that there's a high potential that your kid could get hit by a car, so even if there's no cars coming, you stop them from going in the street. Yet with the children living with substance-abusing parents and illicit drugs, we wait until the children get hit by a car before we intervene, and it would be really nice if we'd start looking at the situation as the same as the street. It is risky, [so] let's keep them from crossing the street and prevent the abuse. And so I think that it's critical that we lay that foundation and the structure. So, we have state DEC Alliances—we have 24 state DEC Alliances across the nation and hope to continually build [alliances in] any of those where there isn't a state DEC Alliance—so that when training happens, people can go back to their states for assistance. We have over a hundred professionals that sit in our working groups for expertise [so people can] ask questions in discipline-specific [areas], so

law enforcement, medical communities, probation, parole, so all of the criminal justice side, child welfare, schools, even environmentalists who can talk about the hazards of the labs. We have those kind of resources and you know, just the federal interagency task force itself. You know, what other like grantees do they have that can then also be—because there is a lot of those that we've started partnering with to just gain momentum and gain strength. So it keeps coming back to a coordinated response, sharing knowledge, sharing information, and helping each other become stronger in our responses.

**Rebecca Rose:** Great, Lori. Thank you so much. And with that I think we'll conclude. I just want to say, Lori, thank you for joining us here today. We are so grateful for you sharing your story with us, both from your perspective from your career in law enforcement and at the National DEC and your personal story as well with us here today. And I think all of you have heard [of the] many resources that Lori has mentioned and [of] a lot of the [Obama] Administration goals around this issue. So we really strongly encourage jurisdictions who are listening to this today—and interested in finding out more about the issue—to see what's being done in your community that you can actually visit the web site of the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children. And the web site for that is [www.nationaldec.org](http://www.nationaldec.org).

**Commander Lori Moriarty:** Correct.

**Rebecca Rose:** Thank you. And in conclusion from BJA's perspective, we did want to leave those folks who are listening with us with an opportunity to think about funding. So through BJA, as many of you know, state and local law enforcement agencies can access funding for things such

as drug-endangered children programming through the Justice Assistance Grants, otherwise known as JAG. The JAG Program, which is administered by BJA, is a leading source of federal justice funding to state and local jurisdictions. And through the JAG Program, BJA provides states, tribes, and local governments with critical funding that is necessary to support a range of program areas, including law enforcement, prosecution and courts, prevention and education, corrections and community corrections, drug treatment and enforcement, planning, evaluation and technology improvement, and crime victim and witness initiatives, which we know this whole drug-endangered children effort hits on any one of those issue areas. So we encourage you to find out more about the JAG Program, if you don't already know, on BJA's web site.

So thank you again, Lori, for joining us here today and taking the time to talk about this important initiative. We at BJA are committed to continuing our work with our partners such as you at the National DEC and at the federal, national, and local level to protect and serve our most vulnerable victims of drug-related activity and crime. So thank you, Lori.

**Commander Lori Moriarty:** Excellent, thanks a lot, Rebecca.

**Closing:** Thank you for taking the time to join us for this conversation. If you found the discussion interesting, we encourage you to visit the BJA web site for more innovative ideas and best practices at [www.ojp.gov/BJA](http://www.ojp.gov/BJA).

From all of us here at BJA, thank you for tuning in to today's podcast. We hope you will join us again for another edition of BJA's Justice Podcast Series.

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