Former U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch leads new national commission developing findings and recommendations to enhance women's safety, health, and justice

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WASHINGTON – Women are now just as likely as men to be victims of violent crime. They now account for more than a quarter of adult arrests. The rate of women's jail incarceration has been edging up; the men's rate has been going down.

While men still make up a disproportionate share of people in the criminal justice system, these troubling trends for women underlie the launch today of a new Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) initiative to document and raise awareness of the distinctive needs of women in the criminal justice system and build consensus for evidence-based reforms that enhance safety, health, and justice.

The nonpartisan national panel, the Women's Justice Commission, is chaired by Loretta Lynch, who championed women's justice issues as U.S. Attorney General, and includes 15 other ideologically diverse leaders representing law enforcement, legislative offices, courts, corrections, medicine, research, advocacy, and directly impacted individuals. Oklahoma First Lady Sarah Stitt, a longtime advocate for breaking generational trauma among women due to substance abuse and mental health issues, is serving as Senior Adviser. The Commission is scheduled to hold its first formal meeting today in New York City, including a visit to Brooklyn program for justice-involved women.

"The unique challenges faced by women moving through our criminal justice system all too often go unseen and unheard," said Lynch, who co-chaired CCJ's National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice. "We can and must do better to reduce the flow of women into the justice system, help them maintain relationships with children and families during incarceration, and provide the support they need to thrive after release."

In conjunction with today's meeting, the Commission released two comprehensive reports – Women's Justice: A Preliminary Assessment of Women in the Criminal Justice System and

Women's Justice: By the Numbers – that paint a statistical portrait of justice-involved women and establish a foundation for the panel's work. Among other findings, the reports show that:

- Females report that they make up a larger share of violent crime victims: 51% of all violent victimizations in 2022 compared to 41% of all victimizations in 1993, the start of the data series. (This figure is drawn from the National Crime Victimization Survey; it excludes homicides and includes simple assaults.)
- Growth in arrest rates for women (41% higher in 2019 than in 1980) is due in part to a rise in arrest rates for violent crimes (63% higher in 2019 than 1980) and drug crimes (317% higher in 2019 than 1980).
- The incarceration rate for women in U.S. prisons and jails increased dramatically (+431%) from 1982 through 2007, and then flattened as the number of incarcerated men began to fall. Between 2010 and 2019, the year before the COVID pandemic jolted the criminal justice system, the female jail incarceration rate went up by 12%, while the male rate fell by 10%. As overall incarcerated populations rebounded in 2021 and 2022 after COVID-related reductions, the increase of the female populations outpaced those of men.
- More than half of the women in state and federal prisons are parents to minor children, and an estimated three of four women in local jails are mothers. Prior to incarceration, mothers were more than twice as likely as fathers to be the sole or primary caretaker of their children.
- Most justice-involved women come from backgrounds of poverty and trauma, and they are more likely than justice-involved men to be victims of physical and sexual abuse, suffer severe substance use and mental health issues, and to have experienced homelessness in the year prior to incarceration.

"This Commission brings together people with the experience, expertise, and passion needed to create tangible, evidence-based solutions to the unique challenges faced by women in our criminal justice system," said Commission Director Stephanie Akhter. "Building off the efforts of others who came before us, we will produce a roadmap to not only improve the lives of women and strengthen families, but also prevent crime and break intergenerational cycles of victimization and incarceration."

Akhter said the Commission's work will span the full scope of the adult justice system—from arrest and diversion through prosecution, incarceration, release, community supervision, and reentry—with a particular focus on trauma-informed and gender-responsive prevention and

intervention strategies. While the Commission will focus on challenges in the adult criminal justice system, it will also explore how girls and their involvement with the juvenile justice system influence those outcomes.

Support for the Women's Justice Commission comes from Ford Foundation, George Kaiser Family Foundation, the Joan Ganz Cooney & Holly Peterson Fund, The Just Trust, Ms. Foundation for Women, the Navigation Fund, the NFL, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, Southern Company Foundation, and the Tow Foundation. The Commission also receives support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and other CCJ general operating contributors.

- **Loretta Lynch (Chair)** – Former U.S. Attorney General; Partner, Paul, Weiss LLP
- **Courtney Bryan** – Executive Director, Center for Justice Innovation
- **Norma Cumpian** – Assistant Deputy Director, Anti-Recidivism Coalition
- **Nancy Gertner** – Retired Judge, U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts; Senior Lecturer, Harvard Law School
- **Ed Gonzalez** – Sheriff, Harris County, Texas
- **Leticia Longoria-Navarro** – Executive Director, The Pathfinder Network
- **Chris Mathias** – Representative, Idaho State Legislature
- **Anne Precythe** – Owner, Precythe Sturm Advisory Group, LLC; Former Director, Missouri Department of Corrections
- **Emily Salisbury** – Associate Professor of Social Work and Director, Utah Criminal Justice Center, University of Utah
- **Topeka K. Sam** – Founder, The Ladies of Hope Ministries
- **Brenda V. Smith** – Professor, American University Washington College of Law; Director, Project on Addressing Prison Rape
- **Jillian Snider** – Policy Director, Criminal Justice and Civil Liberties, R Street Institute; Retired Officer, NYPD
- **Carolyn Sufrin** – Associate Professor, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics; Founder and Director, Advocacy and Research on Reproductive Wellness of Incarcerated People
- **Tori Verber Salazar** – Founder/CEO, Law Offices of Tori Verber Salazar; Former District

Attorney, San Joaquin County

- **Whitney Westerfield** – Senator, Kentucky State Senate
- **Pamela Winn** – President and CEO, RestoreHER US.America

About the Council on Criminal Justice

The Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) is a nonpartisan invitational membership organization and think tank that advances understanding of the criminal justice policy challenges facing the nation and builds consensus for solutions based on facts, evidence, and fundamental principles of justice.