

Mitchell Calls Criminal Justice An 'Astonishing Tale of Neglect'

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Calling the American criminal justice system "an astonishing tale of neglect," Attorney General John N. Mitchell yesterday urged national standards and goals to upgrade police agencies, courts and prison systems.

Mitchell said the government would finance the project, which would include participation of local, state and federal officials.

"By pooling the talents of professionals at all levels of government, we can set yardsticks to measure our progress toward a 20th Century criminal justice system," Mitchell said in speech delivered at the

dedication of a new courthouse in Pasadena, Calif.

A copy of the speech was made available in Washington.

In the strongest terms since he became Attorney General, Mitchell criticized, especially on the state and local levels, the nation's three-headed criminal justice system:

Police — Most states have little or no basic training for police. Police pay ranges as low as \$165 a month, and some police agencies have only the telephone for communication. One unnamed state has only 30 policemen on duty between midnight and 8 a.m.

Courts — In some states, lower court judges and prosecutors are not attorneys. Prosecutor pay is so low in some

states that these lawyers spend much of their time in private practice, "with obvious possibilities for conflict of interest."

In two states, the number of days courts are in session are 72 and 76, respectively. One state reported that its justices of the peace "regularly hold court in pool halls."

Prisons — Most state and local prisons and jails have no convict rehabilitation program. One state reported half of those in jail in its largest cities had not been convicted of a crime. In another state, no effort was made to separate the accused from the convicted.

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Most prisons and jails are overcrowded and antiquated, a condition characterized by one state as "not only deplorable, but in many cases inhuman."

In one state, Mitchell said, inmates themselves serve as guards, armed with rifles and pistols.

A Justice spokesman said that Mitchell got the facts for his "tale of horrors" from state reports to Justice's Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. The states were

not identified, the spokesman said, because it was felt they were being candid and that the overall picture was more important than singling out the states.

Mitchell said that improvements in all three areas must be made, and he cited President Nixon's pledge to make Washington a model community as an example of success in the making.

Through restructuring of the District's court system, bail reform, jail and prison reform, expansion of the police department and other changes, Mitchell said, the backlog of court cases has been reduced and "for the first time in 14 years, crime in the District of Columbia is actually declining."

"Just as the crime wave has been turned back in the nation's capital," he said, "I predict that we can turn it back across the nation."

Mitchell said LEAA would finance and help get rolling in effort to set national performance standards and goals. He characterized LEAA as "a forerunner" in the administra-

tion's revenue sharing proposals, pointing out that the agency has \$480 million to spend on criminal justice this year.

Despite the fact that there have been several reports of corruption, lack of direction, and mismanagement involving LEAA or state and local agencies, Mitchell characterized LEAA's block-grant approach as "an auspicious beginning as we move into a larger framework of revenue sharing between federal and state and local governments."