

# The Washington Post

## Holder: More non-violent offenders should await trial at home, instead of in jail

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WASHINGTON — Most non-violent offenders awaiting trial could be supervised at home instead of being placed in jail without endangering the community, Attorney General Eric Holder said Wednesday.

Holder, speaking at the National Symposium on Pretrial Justice, said many Americans accused of nonviolent or petty offenses remain in jail before trial simply because they cannot afford to post bail of even a few hundred dollars. Nearly two-thirds of inmates in county jails are awaiting trial, many for nonviolent crimes, at a huge cost to taxpayers, he said. And inmates who lose their jobs can also become ineligible for health benefits, relying on emergency rooms for routine treatment after their release.

“Almost all of these individuals could be released and supervised in their communities — and allowed to pursue or maintain employment, and participate in educational opportunities and their normal family lives — without risk of endangering their fellow citizens or fleeing from justice,” Holder said in his prepared remarks.

Holder told an audience of prosecutors, police officials and lawyers that society needs to continue developing better alternatives to incarceration.

He said the Department of Justice was providing guidance to local communities about how best to manage offenders awaiting trial and was also continuing to support programs aimed at helping inmates re-enter society after they serve their sentence and are released from custody.

The two-day symposium comes nearly 50 years after a similar summit, the National Conference on Bail and Criminal Justice, that was organized in 1964 by then-Attorney General Robert Kennedy. That conference paved the way for the Federal Bail Reform Act of 1966, which Holder said created the first major restructuring of bail system since the early days of the country.

A panel discussion on the criminal justice system earlier Wednesday included District of Columbia Police Chief Cathy Lanier and Philadelphia District Attorney Seth Williams, among others.

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