I am pleased to be here to join with the United States Department of Justice and our County leaders in both announcing – and embracing – today’s joint agreement.

This agreement enables the Sheriff’s Department, and our entire County, to look to the future, rather than the past, as we build upon significant progress over the past few years and seek to enhance the treatment of those entrusted to our care and custody.

It presents an opportunity to close the book on challenges of the past and write a new chapter in the treatment and care of those suffering from mental illness who end up in our jails and will eventually return to our communities.

I believe we can all agree that we have already accomplished a great deal, and our jails are a far different place, over the past few years.

I saw firsthand the complex challenges facing the largest jail system and largest de facto mental health facility in the nation as a member of the Citizens’ Commission on Jail Violence in 2012.

In the months and years since that report issued, we have seen

- new leadership,
new practices, and
new accountability put in place

We are moving in the right direction, but we can all agree that continued challenges remain

As we address these challenges, please know that I am personally committed to seeing us achieve the standard of care that those in our jails struggling with mental illness expect and deserve

CHANGE ALREADY UNDERWAY

The agreement announced today is our promise not simply to the Department of Justice, but to our entire community

Working with the federal government, County leaders and outside experts, our Custody Division will continue to implement enhanced training, suicide prevention strategies, mental health programming, improved inmate living conditions and a commitment to robust review of use of force in our jails.

We will create a safer environment for inmates as well as personnel who work in our jails,

And we will enhance the policies and practices that will
  o ensure the humane and constitutional treatment of those in our charge, and
  o increase the likelihood of better outcomes upon their release to our community.
WHY THIS AGREEMENT IS DIFFERENT

- This agreement is a collaborative and comprehensive approach to reform that I and others leaders in this Department welcome.

- It will establish the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department as being on the leading edge of modern correctional systems.

- The agreement spells out in clear terms what is expected and how improvements will be evaluated, so we all know what we are aiming to accomplish and how success will be measured.

- The agreement provides, among other things, for:
  - Increased clinical and custody staffing ratios to assure that inmates are being properly evaluated for and receive needed mental health services;
  - Improved training to identify signs and symptoms of mental illness and apply appropriate de-escalation techniques;
  - Improved conditions of confinement for the inmates;
  - Enhanced review of critical trends and follow up of critical incidents;
  - Improved oversight of compliance; and
  - Increased and enhanced staff observation of inmates to identify and disrupt self-abusive and suicidal behavior.

The dedicated men and women who work in our Custody environment face numerous challenges every day. They have been committed to improving mental health services well before today and were instrumental in identifying problems and solutions in partnership with DOJ.
JAIL COMPLEXITY AND MENTAL ILLNESS

Sadly, our jail system has become a de facto mental health treatment center for mentally ill individuals who suffer from addiction and often end up in our criminal justice system as a result of inadequate community placements or supports.

The Los Angeles County jail has anywhere from 3500-4000 mentally ill inmates on any given day.

That is larger than the number of patients managed in the California State Hospital setting or housed in most other mental health institutions.

Yet our jails were not build for therapeutic care or treatment.

Even as we implement these reforms, we need to redouble our efforts to look for alternatives to incarceration for low level mentally ill individuals who need not be placed into the justice system.

And we need to address the environment in which we house and seek to treat residents of this County who need to be removed from the community.

I have always said that I welcome outside eyes on the Department.

This is and will continue to be a collaborative process for LASD as we work with the Department of Justice, the Board of Supervisors, clinical providers, and outside monitors.
This is our collective opportunity to be on the leading edge of reform and become a national model. We can -- and we will -- raise the bar high in regard to the health, welfare and safety of those in our custody; And in so doing, we will create a safer community for all residents of this great County.