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Celebrating 15 Years of Reform: NYC Mayor Bloomberg and Others Reflect on the Center's Achievements

The Center for Court Innovation celebrated its 15th anniversary on Oct. 4, 2011 at the Chelsea Art Museum with the help of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, Center Director Greg Berman, and Mayoral Advisor John Feinblatt, who was the evening's honoree.

ROBERT V. WOLF: Hi. I'm Rob Wolf, director of communication at the Center for Court Innovation and tonight we're celebrating our 15th anniversary. What follows are some excerpts from tonight's speakers, starting with New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, followed by New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, then our director, Greg Berman, and finally our evening's honoree, John Feinblatt, who is our founding director and now serves as Mayor Michael Bloomberg's senior advisor.

(APPLAUSE)

JUDGE JONATHAN LIPPMAN: It seems like only a short time ago that I met with John Feinblatt to discuss what at the time was an out-of-the-box idea: that the New York State Court System should make a deep investment in research and development and should do that by creating a new entity devoted exclusively to justice reform.

Fifteen years later it is fair to say that this investment has paid off, and how. Nearly two dozen demonstration projects in all five boroughs. Groundbreaking research into the effectiveness of alternatives to incarceration, the value of procedural of justice, and the importance of trial and error in criminal justice reform.

Since the Center started, it has employed hundreds of New Yorkers, many of whom are here tonight. These include social workers who helped troubled young people and struggling adults get back on track; advocates who work behind the scenes to make sure that victims get the support they need to feel safe; researchers who are responsible for helping set new benchmarks for the justice system, and so many more.

Over the past generation, we have shown that contrary to conventional wisdom, it is possible to reduce both crime and incarceration. There are many reasons why New York has been able to achieve these remarkable results. Certainly, the Center for Court



Innovation, with its support for thoughtful innovation and well-crafted and well-evaluated alternatives to incarceration has been part of this story.

(APPLAUSE)

MAYOR MICHAEL BLOOMBERG: You know, by giving the judges more options, more carrots, and more sticks, the Center gives defendants a better chance of turning their lives around and staying out of trouble. We all know about the turnstile justice that we have; reducing recidivism is one of the toughest things to do in criminal justice, but it is probably one of the most important and has the greatest impact on crime rate. Everybody wins when it happens. Our streets are safer, taxpayers spend less money on jail, and people put their talents to more productive uses. And I think it's fair to say that no one has been as effective and finding new ways to reduce recidivism than the Center for Court Innovation and no person has been more effective in finding innovative criminal justice strategies, both inside and outside of government, than John Feinblatt.

As many of you in this room know, John was the founding director of the Center for Court Innovation, and throughout his career, John has been a force for challenging conventional wisdom and disrupting the status quo. That is the defining spirit of the Center for Court Innovation.

The Center has been our partner, seriously, on a number of reform initiatives from improving the return of parolees to Harlem, to reducing juvenile detention in Staten Island and in Queens, to promoting alternative incarceration in the Bronx. Taken together, these programs really have touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers and helped us drive crime down to record lows.

(APPLAUSE)

GREG BERMAN: It is my duty and my pleasure to introduce tonight's honoree, the great John Feinblatt. I have to say the number one lesson I ever learned from John is that rhetoric is ultimately meaningless, and that at the end of the day, action trumps talk every day of the week. And we're here today to celebrate John's commitment to really getting things done on the ground. And it's his commitment to making things happen in the real world that has given us the Midtown Community Court, that has given us the Center for Court Innovation, that has given us a reformed juvenile justice system in New York City, that has given us success in the national fight against illegal guns.

(APPLAUSE)

JOHN FEINBLATT: You know Mike Bloomberg is an extraordinary person to work for.



He asks hard questions, and he expects answers. But it's not just the hard questions; it's that he often asks different kinds of questions. He doesn't just ask "How we can do it better?" but asks "Why do we do it this way in the first place?" I think that's the same spirit that has animated the Center for Court Innovation. It's its willingness to challenge orthodoxy.

I have been lucky to count others as my friends and my mentors, and two of them are the two remarkable chief judges who are here tonight. From the beginning, both of them embraced me and were willing to answer questions that I think very few chief judges were willing to ask, like "What is the role of a judge in a front line state court that's dealing with people who are addicted and people who are poor and people who are mentally ill?" They were willing to ask questions like, "How do we actually measure success in cases that might not be so complicated, legally, but were certainly complicated socially?"

WOLF: You've just heard some remarks from John Feinblatt, our founding director, who was honored tonight at the Center for Court Innovation's 15th anniversary fundraiser. He was preceded by our director, Greg Burman. Before that you heard New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the first remarks you heard were from New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman.

I'm Rob Wolf, director of communication at the Center for Court Innovation. To learn more about the Center, visit us at www.courtinnovation.org. Thanks for listening.