



Bureau of Justice Statistics Fact Sheet

National Task Force Report

APR 1992

Criminal History Record Disposition Reporting: Findings and Strategies

The National Task Force on Criminal History Disposition Reporting was established in 1990 as part of the continuing efforts of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) to improve the quality of criminal history record information. The Task Force was jointly sponsored by BJS, SEARCH Group, Inc., and the National Center for State Courts and was funded by BJS.

Members of the Task Force included representatives of the judiciary, administrative court personnel, directors of State criminal history repositories, the director of a pretrial services agency, a prosecutor and an FBI agent. Robert C. Murphy, Chief Judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals, served as the Chairman. The Task Force met three times during 1990-91.

The report of the Task Force is forthcoming. The findings and recommendations of the Task Force follow.

Findings

1. There is a high incidence of recidivism, and many recidivists have active criminal careers involving multiple arrests and convictions.
2. Because recidivism is a common occurrence, and because many recidivists have active criminal careers, it is appropriate that decisions made about these individuals by both criminal justice and noncriminal justice decisionmakers take into account the recidivists' criminal history records.

Complete criminal history records include information on both arrests and case dispositions. Such complete records are increasingly necessary to support criminal justice decisions relating to prosecution, bail, sentencing, and correctional assignments and noncriminal justice determinations relating to employment, security clearances, and firearm sales.

The National Task Force on Criminal History Record Disposition Reporting was designed to bring together, for

the first time, representatives of State criminal history repositories, the State judiciary, and State court administrators. The deliberations of the Task Force and the findings and recommendations of the group emphasize the importance of joint efforts to increase record accuracy and completeness. These contributions, together with the increasing State activities, will serve to improve the level of disposition reporting throughout the Nation.

Steven D. Dillingham, Ph.D.
Director

3. Accurate and complete criminal history record information assists law enforcement personnel in identifying individuals for investigative purposes.
4. Accurate and complete criminal history records are invaluable to prosecutors in making charging and plea bargaining decisions.
5. Accurate and complete criminal history record information is necessary in order for courts to make appropriate pretrial release decisions.
6. Accurate and complete criminal history record information is necessary in order for prosecutors and courts to make effective case management decisions.

7. Accurate and complete criminal history record information is necessary in order for courts to make appropriate disposition decisions.
8. Accurate and complete criminal history record information is critical in order for correctional and parole agencies to make appropriate and fair decisions.
9. Accurate and complete criminal history record information is critical in order to make appropriate and reliable security clearance and other national security determinations.
10. Accurate and complete criminal history record information is critical in order to make appropriate and reliable determinations for eligibility to purchase and/or carry a firearm.

11. Accurate and complete criminal history record information is critical in order to make appropriate and reliable noncriminal justice licensing and eligibility.

12. Accurate and complete criminal history record information is critical for use in governmental and private sector employment decisions involving positions of trust, such as child care or responsibility for significant financial or other assets.

13. Accurate and complete criminal history record information is critical for public policy and for research purposes.

14. Accurate and complete criminal history record information is critical in order to assure that record subjects are treated in a fair and equitable manner.

15. Available research indicates that, notwithstanding significant and recent progress, dispositions maintained by State central repositories are often missing, incomplete or transferred late to criminal history records.

16. Research indicates that disposition reporting rates vary significantly among State central repositories, with many repositories reporting disposition reporting rates at 50% or below, and many repositories reporting disposition reporting rates (particularly with respect to recent arrests) at 70% or above.

17. Research indicates that the causes for inadequate disposition reporting are many and varied and cannot be attributed to any one component of the criminal justice system.

18. Information and telecommunication technologies exist to facilitate the reporting of disposition and other data to State central repositories.

19. Components of the criminal justice system, as well as entities outside of the criminal justice system, have legitimate but differing needs for criminal history record information. The criminal justice system needs to develop a reliable, high-quality criminal history record information product that takes into account the heterogeneity of needs and that is readily accessible; available on a timely basis; readable; and customized to be of maximum utility to legitimate users.

Strategies for improving disposition reporting

1. In each State appropriate court and executive branch officials should establish a high level task force representing all components of the criminal justice system. The State task force should identify the needs of all legitimate users of criminal history record information within the State. In light of those needs, the State task force should adopt recommendations for a plan for a statewide, comprehensive criminal history record system. Issues to be addressed by State task forces include the role of the State central repository and the linkage of its databases to data maintained by the courts and other components of the criminal justice system, as well as timely and effective access to criminal history record information by the courts.

2. High priority should be given to encouraging further automation in each State's criminal justice system, including the State central repositories' and courts' information systems and, in particular, the establishment of uniform, automated reporting procedures by repositories and courts.

3. Encouragement should be given to the development of electronic data interchange technologies which can improve disposition reporting.

4. Statewide task forces should examine existing statutory and other reporting requirements and, where appropriate, adopt recommendations to address the needs of all users of criminal history record information; time deadlines; expansion of the criminal history data being reported to State central repositories; and improvements in the efficiency of criminal history disposition reporting.

5. State central repositories should work with appropriate components of the criminal justice system to implement procedures for monitoring missing arrests and/or missing dispositions and establish procedures to obtain this information.

6. To ensure that fingerprints are obtained in all reportable cases, each State should develop procedures to ensure that fingerprints are taken and submitted to the State central repository in all cases involving reportable offenses, whether such a case begins by arrest, by the issuance of a summons in lieu of an arrest, or by the filing

of a new case against a person already in custody in connection with a prior case.

7. In order to ensure that all entries related to a particular case are linked, and in order to ensure that, in turn, each case is properly linked to the individual's criminal history record, a unique, fingerprint-supported number ("tracking number") should be assigned to each case upon initiation of case processing.

8. Every State should establish a regular and systematic training program for improving the accuracy and completeness of criminal history record information.

9. Routine, external audits based upon uniform guidelines should be performed to measure the reliability and completeness of criminal history record information in the State central repository, including the performance of all components of the criminal justice system in contributing to the reliability and completeness of the repository's criminal history record information.

10. Decisions about the apportionment of funding among the components of the criminal justice system for improvements in disposition reporting must be made on a State-by-State basis, taking into account the responsibilities and the existing resources of the various components of the criminal justice system for ensuring an accurate and complete criminal history record information system.

Task Force participants

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²Mr. Castille resigned as District Attorney in March 1991, at which time he also resigned from the Task Force.

³Dr. Gallas resigned from NCSC in October 1991 and was replaced on the Task Force by Dr. Sally T. Hillsman.

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Further information

For information on the Task Force report, call Carol Kaplan at 202-307-0759. For information on the BJS Criminal History Record Improvement grant program, call Bernard Shipley, 202-307-0773.

⁴Mr. Stritzinger served as an alternate for Dr. Hugh Collins.

Ordering BJS documents

For other BJS documents relating to criminal history record improvements, call the BJS Clearinghouse at 800-732-3277 and use the NCJ number to order, or write to:
BJS Clearinghouse/NCJRS
Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850.

Attorney General's Program for Improving the Nation's Criminal History Records: BJS Implementation Status Report, February 1992, NCJ-134722

Assessing completeness and accuracy of criminal history record systems: Audit guide, January 1992, NCJ-133651

National Conference on Improving the Quality of Criminal History Records: Proceedings of a BJS/SEARCH conference, January 1992, NCJ-133532

Statutes requiring the use of Criminal History Record Information, June 1991, NCJ-129896

Attorney General's program for improving the Nation's criminal history records and identifying felons who attempt to purchase firearms: Overview, March 1991, NCJ-128131

Survey of criminal history information systems, March 1991, NCJ-125620

"BJS/FBI recommended voluntary standards for improving the quality of Criminal History Record Information," *Federal Register*, February 13, 1991

Criminal justice in the 1990's: The future of information management: Proceedings of a BJS/SEARCH conference, April 1990, NCJ-121697

Report to the Attorney General on systems for identifying felons who attempt to purchase firearms, October 1989

Strategies for improving data quality, April 1989, NCJ-115339

Automated fingerprint identification systems: Technology and policy issues, April 1987, NCJ-104342

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