



Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016

Disabilities Reported by Prisoners

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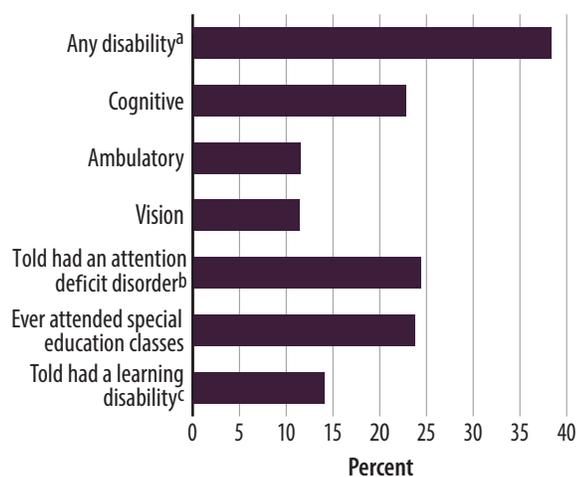
Nearly 2 in 5 (38%) state and federal prisoners had at least one disability in 2016 (figure 1, table 1). Statistics in this report are based on self-reported data collected through face-to-face interviews with a national sample of state and federal prisoners age 18 or older in the 2016 Survey of Prison Inmates (SPI). (See *Methodology*.) Disability types included hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living.¹

The most commonly reported type of disability among both state and federal prisoners was cognitive disability (23%), followed by ambulatory (12%) and vision (11%) disabilities.² Among all prisoners, 24% reported that a doctor, psychologist, or teacher had told them at some point in their life that they had an attention deficit disorder. Nearly a quarter of all prisoners reported participating in special education classes (24%).

¹“Independent living” refers to the ability to navigate daily activities without assistance. Each disability type measured is unique. See *Definitions of disability types*.

²“Cognitive disability” describes a variety of medical conditions affecting different mental tasks, such as problem-solving, reading comprehension, attention, and remembering. A cognitive disability is not the same as a mental disorder.

FIGURE 1
Prevalence of disabilities among all state and federal prisoners, 2016



Note: Prisoners could report more than one disability. See table 1 for percentages and standard errors.

^aIncludes hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living.

^bIncludes prisoners who reported they had ever been told by a doctor, psychologist, or teacher that they had an attention deficit disorder, sometimes called ADD or ADHD.

^cIncludes prisoners who reported they had ever been told by a doctor, psychologist, or teacher that they had a learning disability, such as dyslexia or dyscalculia.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

Highlights

- Nearly 4 in 10 state prisoners (40%) and 3 in 10 federal prisoners (29%) reported having a disability.
- Female state (50%) and federal (40%) prisoners were more likely than male state (39%) and federal (28%) prisoners to report having a disability.
- Among both state and federal prisoners, white prisoners were more likely than black and Hispanic prisoners to report having any disability.
- About a quarter of state prisoners reported a cognitive disability (24%), and about a tenth reported an ambulatory (12%), a vision (12%), or a hearing (10%) disability.
- Among federal prisoners, 14% reported a cognitive disability, 10% reported an ambulatory disability, and 9% reported a vision disability.
- Twenty-six percent of state prisoners and 13% of federal prisoners reported ever being told that they had an attention deficit disorder.



Other key findings

- In both state and federal prisons, female prisoners were more likely than male prisoners to report a cognitive, ambulatory, or independent-living disability (**tables 2 and 3**).
- Forty-four percent of white state prisoners reported a disability, compared to 37% of Hispanic and 33% of black state prisoners.
- Black and Hispanic state prisoners were less likely than white state prisoners to report a hearing, cognitive, ambulatory, or independent-living disability.
- Black federal prisoners were less likely than white federal prisoners to report a hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, or independent-living disability, and equally likely to report a self-care disability.
- More than half of state (57%) and federal (51%) prisoners ages 55 to 64 reported having a disability, and 7 in 10 state (70%) and federal (68%) prisoners age 65 or older reported a disability.
- State and federal prisoners (38%) were about two and a half times more likely to report a disability than adults in the U.S. general population (15%) (**table 4**).
- Twenty-five percent of state prisoners and 14% of federal prisoners reported having ever attended special education classes (**table 5**).
- State prisoners (15%) were nearly twice as likely as federal prisoners (8%) to report that a doctor, psychologist, or teacher had ever told them that they had a learning disability, such as dyslexia or dyscalculia.

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TABLE 1
Prevalence of disabilities among all state and federal prisoners, 2016

Disability	All state and federal prisoners	
	Percent	Standard error
Any disability ^a	38.4%	0.65%
Cognitive	22.8	0.44
Ambulatory	11.5	0.42
Vision	11.4	0.39
Told had an attention deficit disorder ^b	24.4%	0.51%
Ever attended special education classes	23.8%	0.47%
Told had a learning disability ^c	14.1%	0.36%

Note: Prisoners could report more than one disability. See appendix table 1 for prisoner estimates.

^aIncludes hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living.

^bIncludes prisoners who reported they had ever been told by a doctor, psychologist, or teacher that they had an attention deficit disorder, sometimes referred to as ADD or ADHD.

^cIncludes prisoners who reported they had ever been told by a doctor, psychologist, or teacher that they had a learning disability, such as dyslexia or dyscalculia.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

TABLE 2
Disabilities among state prisoners, by demographic characteristics, 2016

Characteristic	Any	Hearing	Vision	Cognitive	Ambulatory	Self-care	Independent living
All state prisoners	39.7%	10.0%	11.7%	24.0%	11.8%	2.5%	6.2%
Sex							
Male*	38.9%	10.0%	11.7%	23.0%	11.6%	2.5%	6.1%
Female	49.8 †	8.9	12.1	36.8 †	14.2 †	2.4	8.0 †
Race/ethnicity							
White ^{a*}	44.4%	13.3%	11.3%	27.1%	12.6%	2.4%	7.1%
Black ^a	33.4 †	5.6 †	11.1	19.6 †	10.0 †	1.8 †	4.8 †
Hispanic	36.9 †	9.3 †	12.1	21.9 †	10.6 †	2.6	5.6 †
American Indian/ Alaskan Native ^a	49.2	17.0	18.4 †	29.4	16.4	3.8	8.9
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander ^a	35.4 †	7.7 †	7.7	23.9	8.0	2.3!	2.1 †!
Two or more races ^a	48.7 †	14.1	13.6 †	31.6 †	16.5 †	4.1 †	9.3 †
Age							
18-24	34.6%	4.2% †	9.4%	25.5% †	2.9% †	0.7%!	3.6%
25-34*	32.1	5.4	7.7	22.8	4.8	0.8	3.7
35-44	36.0 †	8.2 †	9.5 †	23.4	9.4 †	1.9 †	5.3 †
45-54	46.7 †	13.3 †	16.7 †	25.1 †	17.3 †	3.5 †	7.9 †
55-64	57.1 †	21.5 †	20.2 †	25.3	30.0 †	6.5 †	12.4 †
65 or older	69.7 †	35.4 †	24.0 †	26.8	45.8 †	11.8 †	19.8 †

Note: Prisoners could report more than one disability. See appendix table 1 for prisoner estimates. See appendix table 2 for standard errors.

*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

! Interpret with caution. Estimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

^aExcludes persons of Hispanic origin (e.g., “white” refers to non-Hispanic whites and “black” refers to non-Hispanic blacks).

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

TABLE 3**Disabilities among federal prisoners, by demographic characteristics, 2016**

Characteristic	Any	Hearing	Vision	Cognitive	Ambulatory	Self-care	Independent living
All federal prisoners	28.8%	6.4%	9.4%	13.7%	9.5%	1.7%	4.2%
Sex							
Male*	28.1%	6.4%	9.3%	12.8%	9.2%	1.6%	4.0%
Female	40.2 †	6.5	10.4	26.9 †	14.3 †	2.6	6.8 †
Race/ethnicity							
White ^{a*}	36.8%	9.5%	8.8%	19.4%	12.2%	1.7%	5.9%
Black ^a	22.0 †	3.7 †	6.2 †	10.4 †	7.3 †	1.3	3.4 †
Hispanic	26.8 †	5.2 †	12.0 †	11.3 †	8.9	1.6	3.1 †
American Indian/ Alaskan Native ^a	47.0	20.7	6.2!	29.2	13.2	6.9!	15.3
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander ^a	39.0	10.1!	8.6!	19.0	7.7!	2.2!	2.3!
Two or more races ^a	40.8	11.4	12.5	19.9	13.8	3.5	7.3
Age							
18-24	26.7%	3.3%!	5.5%	17.5%	2.5%!	0.5%!	5.1%!
25-34*	22.7	3.4	7.4	13.6	3.5	1.0	2.5
35-44	22.5	3.6	6.8	12.0	6.3 †	1.1	2.7
45-54	33.9 †	8.1 †	12.3 †	14.0	14.0 †	2.1	4.5 †
55-64	50.5 †	17.9 †	16.9 †	16.2	25.2 †	4.6 †	11.8 †
65 or older	67.8 †	28.9 †	21.9 †	18.0	41.0 †	6.9 †	13.1 †

Note: Prisoners could report more than one disability. See appendix table 1 for prisoner estimates. See appendix table 3 for standard errors.

*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

! Interpret with caution. Estimate is based on 10 or fewer sample cases, or coefficient of variation is greater than 50%.

^aExcludes persons of Hispanic origin (e.g., “white” refers to non-Hispanic whites and “black” refers to non-Hispanic blacks).

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

TABLE 4**Disabilities among all state and federal prisoners and the U.S. general population age 18 or older, by age, 2016**

	Any disability ^a			
	All state and federal prisoners		Adult U.S. general population*	
	Percent	Standard error	Percent	Standard error
All	38.4% †	0.65%	15.4%	0.01%
Age				
18-34	31.8% †	0.73%	6.3%	0.01%
18-24	34.1	1.49	6.2	...
25-34	31.1	0.72	6.5	...
35-64	41.5% †	0.73%	13.1%	0.01%
35-44	34.0	0.85	7.8	...
45-54	44.9	1.11	12.5	...
55-64	56.4	1.49	19.0	...
65 or older	69.5% †	2.45%	35.2%	0.01%
65-74	67.6 †	2.56	25.3	0.01
75 or older	81.7 †	4.90	49.5	0.01

Note: More than one disability could be reported.

...Not available.

*Comparison group.

†Difference with the comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

^aIncludes hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016; and U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2016.

TABLE 5

State and federal prisoners who were ever told they had an attention deficit disorder, ever attended special education classes, or were ever told they had a learning disability, 2016

Indicator of other disabilities	State prisoners		Federal prisoners*	
	Percent	Standard error	Percent	Standard error
Told had an attention deficit disorder ^a	26.1% †	0.55%	12.7%	1.13%
Ever attended special education classes	25.2 †	0.51	13.8	1.21
Told had a learning disability ^b	15.0 †	0.40	7.7	0.68

Note: Prisoners could report multiple learning disabilities. See appendix table 1 for prisoner estimates.

*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

^aIncludes prisoners who reported they had ever been told by a doctor, psychologist, or teacher that they had an attention deficit disorder, sometimes called ADD or ADHD.

^bIncludes prisoners who reported they had ever been told by a doctor, psychologist, or teacher that they had a learning disability, such as dyslexia or dyscalculia.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

Definitions of disability types

Six questions were included on the 2016 Survey of Prison Inmates to measure any disability. These questions were modeled after those on the American Community Survey, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Hearing—Are you deaf or do you have serious difficulty hearing?

Vision—Are you blind or do you have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?

Cognitive—Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, do you have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?

Ambulatory—Do you have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?

Self-care—Do you have difficulty dressing or bathing?

Independent living—Because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem, do you have difficulty doing

activities on your own, such as going to meal time, going outside, working in or outside of this facility, going to classes, or attending programs?

Other disabilities and disorders examined in this report include learning disabilities, such as dyslexia or dyscalculia, attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and participation in special education classes.

Attention deficit disorder (ADD or ADHD)—Has a doctor, psychologist, or teacher ever told you that you have an attention deficit disorder, sometimes called ADD or ADHD?

Special education—Have you ever been enrolled in special education classes, sometimes called SPED?

Learning disability—Has a doctor, psychologist, or teacher ever told you that you have a learning disability, such as dyslexia or dyscalculia?

Change in disabilities among all state and federal prisoners, 2011-2012 and 2016

The 2016 Survey of Prison Inmates (SPI) had a different sampling frame from the 2011-12 National Inmate Survey (NIS), the previous survey that collected data on disabilities from prisoners.³ To produce comparable data, BJS made two adjustments. First, because the 2011-12 NIS did not include prisoners in community-based correctional facilities, those prisoners were removed from the 2016 SPI sample before analysis. Second, because the federal population in the 2011-12 NIS was not designed to be self-representing but as part of a representative sample for all prisoners, the comparisons made between the years were for all prisoners, without separating out state and federal prisoners.

After these adjustments, a comparison between the years showed an increase in the prevalence of prisoners reporting any disability between 2011-12 (32%) and 2016 (38%) (**table 6**). The 2016 survey showed increased reporting of hearing, vision, and cognitive disabilities.

³Mode effects may impact the differences observed between 2011-12 and 2016 percentages, as audio computer-assisted self-interviewing was used to collect NIS data, while SPI data were collected through face-to-face interviews using computer-assisted personal interviewing. For detailed methodology for this data collection, see *Sexual Victimization in Prisons and Jails Reported by Inmates, 2011-12* (NCJ 241399, BJS, May 2013).

TABLE 6
Prevalence of disabilities among all state and federal prisoners, by selected disabilities, 2011-2012 and 2016

Disability	2011-2012*		2016 ^a	
	Percent	Standard error	Percent	Standard error
Any	31.6%	1.40%	38.4% †	0.65%
Hearing	6.2	0.61	9.5 †	0.32
Vision	7.1	0.69	11.5 †	0.39
Cognitive	19.5	1.13	22.8 †	0.45
Ambulatory	10.1	0.76	11.6	0.43
Self-care	2.1	0.29	2.4	0.18
Independent living	7.5	0.71	6.0 †	0.26

Note: Prisoners could report more than one disability. Based on the adjusted 2016 data, there was an estimated total of 1,403,600 state and federal prisoners in 2016. There was an estimated total of 1,441,800 state and federal prisoners in 2011-2012.

*Comparison group.

†Difference with comparison group is significant at the 95% confidence level.

^aTo allow for comparison to 2011-2012, estimates for 2016 exclude those held in community-based correctional facilities.

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Inmate Survey, 2011-2012; and Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

Methodology

Findings are based on self-reported data collected through face-to-face interviews with a national sample of state and federal prisoners in the 2016 Survey of Prison Inmates (SPI), produced by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The 2016 SPI included confinement and community-based facilities but excluded special facilities such as those operated by or holding prisoners exclusively for the U.S. military, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the U.S. Marshals Service, and correctional authorities in Indian country. Facilities in every state and the Federal Bureau of Prisons were eligible. The 2016 SPI was a stratified two-stage sample design in which prisons were selected in the first stage and prisoners within sampled facilities were selected in the second stage. The SPI sample was selected from a universe of 2,001 unique prisons (1,808 state and 193 federal). A total of 364 prisons (306 state and 58 federal) participated in the 2016 SPI out of 385 selected (324 state and 61 federal). The first-stage response rate (i.e., the response rate among selected prisons) was 98.4% (98.1% among state prisons and 100% among federal prisons).⁴

A total of 24,848 prisoners (20,064 state and 4,784 federal) participated in the 2016 SPI, based on a sample of 37,058 prisoners (30,348 state and 6,710 federal).⁵ The second-stage response rate (i.e., the response rate among selected prisoners) was 70.0% (69.3% among state prisoners and 72.8% among federal prisoners).⁶

Standard errors and tests of significance

When national estimates are derived from a sample, as with the SPI, caution must be used when comparing one estimate to another or when comparing estimates over time. Although one estimate may be larger than another, estimates based on a sample rather than a complete enumeration of the population have some degree of sampling error. The sampling error of an

estimate depends on several factors, including the size of the estimate, the number of completed interviews, and the intracluster correlation of the outcome within prisons. When the sampling error around an estimate is taken into account, estimates that appear different may not be statistically different.

One measure of the sampling error associated with an estimate is the standard error. The standard error may vary from one estimate to the next. Standard errors in this report were estimated using Taylor Series Linearization (TSL) to account for the complex design of the 2016 SPI and the 2011-12 National Inmate Survey. The TSL method directly estimates variances through a linearized function by combining variance estimates from stratum and primary sampling units used to sample prisoners.

Readers may use the estimates and standard errors of the estimates provided in this report to generate a 95% confidence interval around the estimates as a measure of the margin of error. Typically, multiplying the standard error by 1.96 and then adding or subtracting the result from the estimate produces the confidence interval. This interval expresses the range of values within which the true population parameter is expected to fall 95% of the time if the same sampling method is used to select different samples.

For small samples and estimates close to 0%, the use of the standard error to construct the 95% confidence interval may not be reliable. Therefore, caution should be used when interpreting the estimates. Caution should also be used if constructing a 95% confidence interval, which would include zero in these cases, because the estimate may not be distinguishable from zero.

The standard errors have been used to compare selected groups of prisoners that have been defined by demographic characteristics. They have also been used to compare estimates of state and federal prisoners between 2011-12 and 2016. Differences in the estimates for subgroups in tables 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 in this report have been tested and notated for significance at the 95% level of confidence. Readers should reference the tables for testing on specific findings. Unless otherwise noted, findings described in this report as higher, lower, or different passed a test at the 0.5 level of statistical significance (95% confidence level).

⁴A total of 15 prisons (12 state and 3 federal) that were sampled were deemed ineligible for the 2016 SPI. For more information, see *Methodology: Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016* (NCJ 252210, BJS, July 2019).

⁵There were 10,661 sampled prisoners who were eligible for the survey but did not participate. Another 1,549 sampled prisoners were deemed ineligible for the survey. For more information, see *Methodology: Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016* (NCJ 252210, BJS, July 2019).

⁶For more detailed information on the 2016 SPI, see *Methodology: Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016* (NCJ 252210, BJS, July 2019).

APPENDIX TABLE 1**Estimated number of state and federal prisoners, by demographic characteristics, 2016**

Characteristic	State prisoners	Federal prisoners
All prisoners	1,248,300	173,400
Sex		
Male	1,159,100	162,700
Female	89,200	10,700
Race/ethnicity		
White*	391,800	35,900
Black*	415,500	55,000
Hispanic	254,700	63,500
American Indian/ Alaskan Native*	17,600	2,800
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander*	11,400	2,600
Two or more races*	138,600	11,200
Age		
18-24	128,500	8,200
25-34	400,800	48,900
35-44	328,800	59,700
45-54	231,000	37,300
55-64	120,900	14,400
65 or older	38,400	4,900

Note: Numbers are rounded to the nearest 100. Details may not sum to totals due to rounding and missing data. Counts are weighted to totals from the 2015 National Prisoner Statistics Program. See *Methodology: Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016* (NCJ 252210, BJS, July 2019).

*Excludes persons of Hispanic origin (e.g., “white” refers to non-Hispanic whites and “black” refers to non-Hispanic blacks).

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016*.

APPENDIX TABLE 2**Standard errors for table 2: Disabilities among state prisoners, by demographic characteristics, 2016**

Characteristic	Any	Hearing	Vision	Cognitive	Ambulatory	Self-care	Independent living
All state prisoners	0.72%	0.35%	0.43%	0.49%	0.47%	0.20%	0.29%
Sex							
Male	0.76%	0.37%	0.46%	0.51%	0.50%	0.21%	0.31%
Female	1.38	0.61	0.65	1.03	0.85	0.34	0.55
Race/ethnicity							
White	0.96%	0.64%	0.69%	0.74%	0.63%	0.27%	0.45%
Black	0.93	0.35	0.49	0.68	0.56	0.20	0.32
Hispanic	1.31	0.60	0.86	0.86	0.79	0.36	0.49
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	3.84	2.76	3.11	3.68	3.05	1.53	2.10
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	4.50	2.10	2.63	4.27	2.33	1.25	1.03
Two or more races	1.43	1.07	0.92	1.26	0.98	0.54	0.78
Age							
18-24	1.57%	0.52%	0.91%	1.39%	0.46%	0.23%	0.52%
25-34	0.79	0.40	0.43	0.65	0.36	0.15	0.31
35-44	0.98	0.53	0.52	0.81	0.54	0.22	0.38
45-54	1.23	0.67	0.85	0.91	0.79	0.34	0.56
55-64	1.61	1.26	1.51	1.30	1.43	0.69	0.98
65 or older	2.72	2.26	2.02	2.10	3.05	1.83	1.96

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.

APPENDIX TABLE 3**Standard errors for table 3: Disabilities among federal prisoners, by demographic characteristics, 2016**

Characteristic	Any	Hearing	Vision	Cognitive	Ambulatory	Self-care	Independent living
All federal prisoners	1.10%	0.53%	0.69%	0.81%	0.68%	0.25%	0.39%
Sex							
Male	1.15%	0.56%	0.72%	0.84%	0.71%	0.26%	0.40%
Female	2.43	0.64	1.59	1.91	1.66	0.47	1.19
Race/ethnicity							
White	1.72%	1.13%	0.92%	1.57%	1.46%	0.41%	0.83%
Black	1.24	0.46	0.90	0.78	0.91	0.35	0.56
Hispanic	1.80	0.68	1.17	1.31	0.83	0.41	0.52
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	7.63	5.90	3.00	6.07	3.27	2.95	7.29
Asian/Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	6.20	3.37	4.03	5.04	3.16	1.52	1.86
Two or more races	3.50	2.59	2.20	2.46	2.20	0.94	1.37
Age							
18-24	3.81%	2.08%	1.67%	2.74%	1.07%	0.49%	2.32%
25-34	1.41	0.53	0.73	1.20	0.48	0.30	0.50
35-44	1.34	0.54	0.98	0.91	0.66	0.24	0.46
45-54	2.20	1.23	1.40	1.74	1.31	0.52	0.69
55-64	3.41	2.32	2.80	2.02	2.77	1.23	1.94
65 or older	3.57	3.33	4.13	3.25	5.19	2.45	3.23

Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Prison Inmates, 2016.



The Bureau of Justice Statistics of the U.S. Department of Justice is the principal federal agency responsible for measuring crime, criminal victimization, criminal offenders, victims of crime, correlates of crime, and the operation of criminal and civil justice systems at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels. BJS collects, analyzes, and disseminates reliable statistics on crime and justice systems in the United States, supports improvements to state and local criminal justice information systems, and participates with national and international organizations to develop and recommend national standards for justice statistics. Doris J. James is the acting director.

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