



# CRIME & JUSTICE RESEARCH ALLIANCE

## Board Members

March 13, 2020

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Criminology  
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Professor of Criminology  
University of Nebraska

The Honorable José E. Serrano  
Chair, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
Capitol Building, H-310  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Robert Aderholt  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related  
Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
1016 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Serrano and Ranking Member Aderholt,

On behalf of the nation's criminology research community, we write to urge your support for an increase in funding for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and National Institute of Justice (NIJ) in your FY 2021 Commerce-Justice-Science Appropriations bills. As you know, these agencies have not received a meaningful increase in funding for several years. In fact, the funding for these agencies has decreased dramatically over the past 10 years, save for modest increases in FY2018. This is deeply concerning, particularly when the demand for independent research on criminal justice matters is the highest it has been during the last decade, and the number of congressionally-mandated data collections and reports has increased.

At the end of 2018, Congress passed the largest criminal justice reform bill in the last two decades, the First Step Act. Much of the bipartisan consensus around the need for reform was the result of objective crime and justice data that revealed flaws in the criminal justice system and the need for reform.

The demand from federal, state and local policymakers and law enforcement practitioners for objective research to guide necessary reforms to policing, corrections and sentencing, mental health, addiction, and reentry has not abated. Development and implementation of policy reforms relies heavily on research

and program evaluations funded through NIJ and BJS. While we are encouraged with the growing application of criminal justice research, we are concerned about the limited resources available to these agencies to accommodate this increasing demand.



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While we believe funding for both agencies is equally important, however, we wish to highlight some of the challenges that BJS is confronting that have significantly delayed the release of regular and annual data collections and reports. In most cases the delay is measured in years. Specifically, in separate communications with BJS, we identified numerous data collections and reports, including the Survey of Sexual Victimization (SSV) (Formerly Survey of Sexual Violence), the Firearm Inquiry Statistics (FIST), The National Corrections Reporting Program (NCRP), the Deaths In Custody Reporting Program (mandated by the DCRA), the Survey of Jails in Indian Country (SJIC) and the national Survey of Prison Inmates (SPI). Data and reports from these collections have not been published for several years.

We have learned of staffing shortages at BJS that have led to a prioritization of what can and can't be done, and which affect BJS' ability to produce data and reports in a timely fashion and we ask you to consider these challenges and delays as you weigh funding for BJS. We recognize BJS's central role as the nation's primary source of timely crime and justice data, the collection and reporting of which is critical to the crime and justice research community and to inform sound policymaking at federal, state, and local levels. Workforce shortages, hiring freezes, and employee attrition have negatively impacted the ability of BJS to serve the American people.

Given the above challenges and the decline in funding in FY2020, we request a \$5 million increase for both NIJ and BJS in FY 2021, to \$41 million and \$48 million, respectively. Thank you for your continued leadership on the Commerce-Justice-Science Subcommittees to ensure that criminal justice policies and programs are informed by objective and timely research that yields informed and effective policy outcomes. We look forward to working with you and your staff as you continue your development of the FY 2021 Appropriations bill.

Best Wishes,

Peter B. Wood, Chair  
Crime & Justice Research Alliance