



AMERICAN STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION

Promoting the Practice and Profession of Statistics®

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July 2, 2019

Senator Brian Schatz
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Schatz,

On behalf of the American Statistical Association (ASA), I would like to express my strong support for the “[Improving Justice Programs Through Science Act of 2019](#),” which establishes a science advisory board (SAB) at the Department of Justice (DOJ).

As previously chartered from January 2010 through March 2017, the SAB served to bridge the divide between research and practice in criminal justice fields. The SAB provided an extra-agency review of and recommendations for Office of Justice Programs (OJP) research, statistics, and grant programs, ensuring its activities were scientifically sound and pertinent to policymakers and practitioners. As the DOJ embarks on the initial implementation of recently passed criminal justice reform legislation, the input of the SAB is especially pertinent. Indeed, the SAB served the same role for DOJ as more than 100 science advisory committees play across the federal government on topics as diverse as health, energy, defense, and the environment.

Since the dissolution of the previous SAB, OJP has appointed ad hoc committees to address individual topics. This approach, in which scientific experts summarize current research on a particular issue, can be useful. However, these ad-hoc committees cannot ensure an ongoing relationship between OJP leadership and staff and the scientific community. They also do not have the broad perspective of an overall SAB to promote the consistent and rigorous scientific approaches needed when OJP confronts new issues.

The diverse representation of disciplines and research interests on a SAB ensures informed consultation can be obtained across a wide spectrum of issues. When focused attention is needed on a specific topic, this SAB can identify appropriate individuals with relevant expertise. A SAB also facilitates interagency communication by coordinating OJP agencies to discuss common scientific issues, thereby facilitating knowledge transfer.

The previous SAB served as a conduit between the research community and OJP. For example, through regular interactions with OJP leadership and staff, members of the SAB gained a deeper appreciation for the complexities of implementing and evaluating innovative approaches to the administration of criminal and juvenile justice. The SAB was then able to share this knowledge about the perspectives and needs of policymakers and practitioners with the research community, thereby ensuring the research was more relevant to DOJ's mission.

Improving the underpinning of forensic science is one example in which SAB input would be extremely valuable. DOJ's decision not to renew in 2017 the charter for the National Commission on Forensic Science (NCFS) left a regrettably large gap in the expertise and leadership needed to drive forensic science reform at a time when the dedicated and professional NCFS committee members were making great strides toward that goal.

Working with OJP staff, the previous SAB made numerous contributions to the work of OJP, including the following:

- Guidelines for implementing and evaluating place-based interventions (broad, multifaceted efforts to reduce crime in specific locales)
- A checklist for police departments to use in assessing their capacity to provide information to communities about their operations and success (distributed through the Police Executive Research Forum)
- Outlines of strategies to address the critical question of dwindling response rates in surveys related to crime patterns and criminal justice practices
- A set of guidelines for determining when a randomized controlled trial of an intervention was feasible and appropriate

These products demonstrate the value of coupling the knowledge and experience of OJP staff with the expertise of SAB members on the working committees. We urge the SAB model be reinstated.

Thank you for sponsoring this bill to reauthorize the Scientific Advisory Board.

Sincerely,



Karen Kafadar
2019 President, American Statistical Association