



AMERICAN STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION
Promoting the Practice and Profession of Statistics®

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March 8, 2024

The Honorable Hal Rogers
Chair, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Chair, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Matt Cartwright
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science, and
Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on
Commerce, Justice, Science, and
Related Agencies
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairs Rogers and Shaheen and Ranking Members Cartwright and Moran,

I write in support of investments to further inform government investments and policies to address crime, law enforcement safety, judicial process and related issues through research insights and more relevant and timely statistics. Specifically for fiscal year 2025 (FY25), we request that you fund the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) at \$60 million and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) at \$75 million, and increase the OJP research and statistics set-aside to three percent. We also request that you maintain NIJ budget authority by not specifying funding amounts for individual research topics. Both agencies are poised to make immediate and effective investments to further our understanding of criminal justice issues and ultimately make our country safer and more just through responsible use of taxpayer funding.

NIJ is the largest US federal funder of research in the forensic sciences. Because of its research support, the research community has gained a better understanding of the accuracy associated with traditional forensic examination approaches, developed algorithmic and software tools to assist examiners by providing quantitative support for their conclusions, made scientific

breakthroughs that allow for analysis of more complex samples, and provided databases as resources for the forensic community. Research contributions like these are needed to reduce errors by improving the forensic tools available to the criminal justice system.

The 2009 National Academies of Sciences report, "[Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward](#)," highlighted gaps in various forensic science disciplines. This report concluded, "With the exception of nuclear DNA analysis, however, no forensic method has been rigorously shown to have the capacity to consistently, and with a high degree of certainty, demonstrate a connection between evidence and a specific individual or source." Progress has been made in the last 13 years with NIJ support. For example, the NIJ has supported several high-impact reliability studies of examiners in fingerprints, firearms, handwriting, bloodstain pattern, and tire treads.

Unfortunately, due to budget constraints, NIJ has had to steadily cut back funding of forensic science over the last several years. Since peak funding in FY15 of nearly \$30 million for forensic science research and development, funding fell to [\\$16 million in FY23](#). Additionally, funding for forensics science research out of the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grants program that was coordinated by NIJ was discontinued in FY20. The three measures requested here—funding the NIJ at \$60 million in FY25; restoring the OJP research and statistics set-aside to three percent and maintaining NIJ budget authority—will bring needed investments in forensics science research. Allowing NIJ leadership to exercise their expert, professional judgment over NIJ research spending, while taking into account Congressional preferences, would help important programs such as forensic science research to receive much-needed funding.

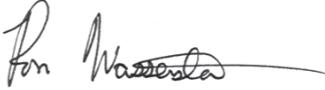
BJS in the Department of Justice provides objective, reliable, and trustworthy statistics on a variety of justice-related issues, including "crime, criminal offenders, victims of crime, and the operation of justice systems at all levels of government." These data are critical to federal, state, and local policymakers in combating crime and ensuring that justice is both efficient and evenhanded. Established in 1979, its existing principal products cover the following nine topics: corrections, courts, crime type, criminal justice data improvement program, employment and expenditure, federal processing of criminal cases, Indian country justice statistics, law enforcement, and victims.

The need for objective, reliable statistics on crime and our criminal justice system is now as important as it has ever been. Despite its broad charge, BJS is among the smallest of the 13 principal federal statistical agencies by budget with an FY24 level of \$35 million. Further hampering its ability to fulfill its mission and meet demand for criminal justice statistics, BJS has

been flat funded for over a decade, resulting in a 38 percent loss of purchasing power since 2012 and more since the late 2000's. For more details, please see the [enclosure](#).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

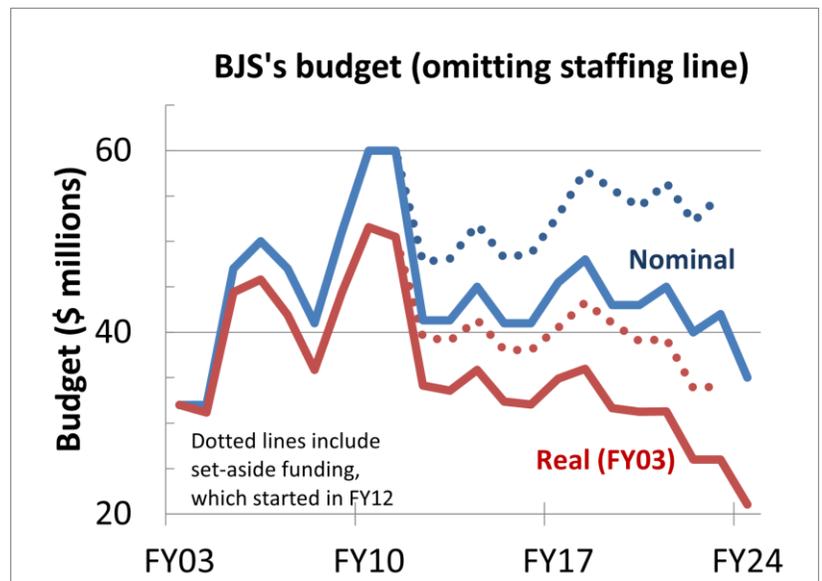
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ron Wasserstein". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ron Wasserstein
ASA Executive Director

Enclosure: Invest in the Future of US Criminal Justice Statistics: The case for funding the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) at \$75 million in FY25.

What is BJS? The BJS in the Department of Justice provides objective, reliable, and trustworthy statistics on a variety of justice-related issues, including “crime, criminal offenders, victims of crime, and the operation of justice systems at all levels of government.” These data are critical to federal, state, and local policymakers in combating crime and ensuring that justice is both efficient and evenhanded. Established in 1979, its existing principal products cover the following nine topics: corrections, courts, crime type, criminal justice data improvement program, employment and expenditure, federal processing of criminal cases, Indian country justice statistics, law enforcement, and victims. BJS’ independent statistics help stakeholders and policymakers accurately understand crime and support Congress in being good stewards of taxpayers’ dollars by allocating them efficiently to programs that are making an impact.

What are BJS’ Challenges? The need for objective, reliable statistics on crime and our criminal justice system is now as important as it has ever been, with a White House initiative underway to address the need and multiple private efforts underway. Despite its broad charge, BJS is among the smallest of the 13 principal federal statistical agencies by budget with an FY24 level of \$35 million. Further hampering its ability to fulfill its mission and meet demand for criminal justice statistics, BJS has been flat funded for over a decade, resulting in a 38% loss of purchasing power since 2012 and even more since the late 2000’s. Increasing BJS’ budget to \$75 million in FY25 would be a much-needed down payment for a multi-year increase so that it can meet its mandates. We also request the BJS/NIJ set aside be increased to three percent.

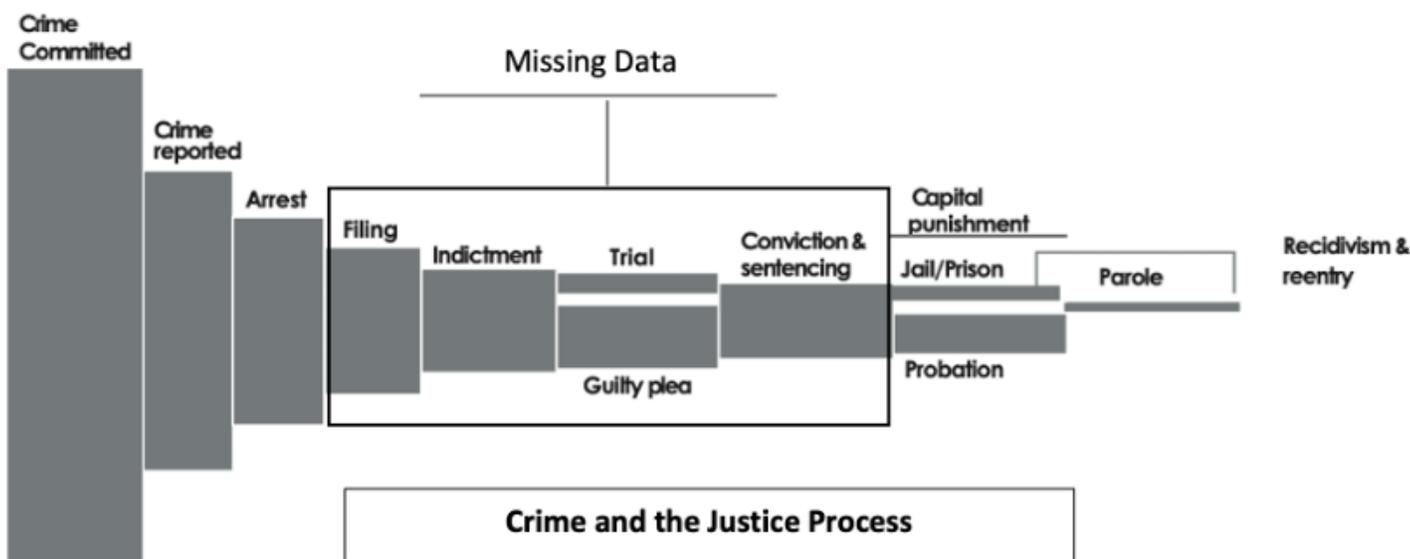


How BJS supports our criminal justice system:

- Produces the best victimization survey in the world—the [National Crime Victimization Survey \(NCVS\)](#) which is the nation's primary source of information on criminal victimization.
- Produces [datasets](#), [publications](#) and [data analysis tools](#) that allow policymakers and the general public to better understand the criminal justice system and how it operates at the federal, state, and local levels.
- Through various [programs](#), publishes data on community safety, law enforcement, courts, and corrections, providing essential data to inform public safety providers and support evidence-based initiatives.
- Links criminal justice data to data on other indicators of social wellness offer the opportunity to explore how interaction with criminal victimization and the criminal justice system impacts housing, employment, education, and a range of other aspects of the life of Americans.

Priority 1: Filling the data gap in coverage of the criminal justice system

The prosecutorial process is arguably the most consequential step in the criminal justice proceedings, in part because many decisions are not subject to review (e.g., the declination decision). Nevertheless, we have little information about this phase, rendering it largely invisible. Similarly, sentencing is the decision with the greatest impact on citizens, yet our only information on sentencing comes from correctional agencies when an offender is admitted to prison. How often sentences are imposed and all other aspects of criminal sentencing, such as fines, special conditions of supervision, and mandatory treatment, are unknown. BJS has not had the funds to maintain their existing collection and to follow the National Academy of Science's recommendations of building new collections on prosecution and sentencing. Investing now will position BJS to:



- leverage new privately and publicly funded efforts to build statistical systems to collect data in new and less burdensome ways.
- assess the reliability of criminal history records for measuring prosecution and court decisions. BJS has done some to study recidivism, but further work needs to be done to determine how reliably these records can measure booking, charging, and sentencing decisions by accounting for differences among states in reporting and recording records.

Priority 2: Sustaining National Crime Victimization Survey Advances

NCVS, which provides the victim's view of crime and the justice system, is both at risk and in need of improvements. Declining response rates require increasingly innovative ways to contact citizens using multiple methods including the use of social media. These methods have been tested and need to be incorporated into the on-going survey. Some improvements have been under-written temporarily by support from the Office for Victims of Crime, but this funding is not part of the survey's budget and is provided on a year-to-year basis.

BJS should produce sub-national estimates for states and large jurisdictions. Expansion of the information on police-to-public contacts and the collection of that information from the full sample of respondents will provide a more accurate and complete picture and allow for subnational estimates to see how this issue varies across places. This also applies to the use of victim services. Billions of dollars have been spent on creating a victim service industry but the use of those services has remained stubbornly at 10% of victims. The survey can help explore why victims use these services and why the use has not expanded over time.

For more information contact Steve Pierson, Director of Science Policy at spierson@amstat.org