

# Ohio Criminal Justice Strategic Plan

## Core Group Interview Summary

This document is a summary of interviews conducted with key stakeholders from May – June 2011 in preparation for developing a comprehensive, statewide criminal justice strategic plan. Major themes are discussed in addition to area-specific needs.



## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	2
Purpose.....	3
Overall Themes.....	3
Specific Area Needs .....	5
Victims.....	6
Law Enforcement .....	8
Courts .....	12
Juvenile Justice.....	15
Corrections.....	17
Treatment .....	19
Other Local/State .....	22
Next Steps.....	25

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## Purpose

The core group interviews established the foundation for developing the comprehensive statewide strategic plan. The interviews were conducted May – June, 2011 with key stakeholders in fields that touch many areas of Ohio’s justice system. All interviewees were provided the same questions prior to their interview. Additional probing questions were asked based on their responses.

1. What are the top criminal justice needs in Ohio?
2. We are interested in opportunities you see for collaboration within your field as well as across the justice system. Please identify gaps where you believe improved partnerships would be beneficial.
3. What information would be helpful in your current position?
4. If you had a pot of money:
  - a. Within your agency, what area would you allocate monies to?
  - b. How would you allocate funds for the overall justice system?
  - c. What role should federal grant programs play in funding local and state programs?

## Overall Themes<sup>1</sup>

All statements contained in this report represent a summary of information provided by core group interviewees. The following themes were consistently presented during the interviews regardless of the interviewee’s field of expertise or area of specialization.

### Top Criminal Justice Needs

#### Mental Health/Substance Abuse Treatment

Interviewees repeatedly named this as the most important need for Ohio’s justice system. The importance of evidence-based programs and overall research that lead to appropriate programming and offender placement was emphasized. Interviewees discussed the far reaching effects of not treating or incorrectly treating offenders in need of mental health and/or substance abuse treatment. This affects local and state budgets, offender populations in correctional facilities, community supervision, and overall reentry efforts.

#### Number of People Incarcerated

Nearly all those interviewed stated that the sentencing structure and prison overcrowding issues in Ohio need to be addressed. However many were concerned with the shift of offenders from the state to local communities. The money saved on the state level is not being funneled to local communities who will undoubtedly see an increase in demand

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<sup>1</sup> All views expressed in this report are those of the interviewees even though this is not repeatedly stated throughout the report to reduce redundancy.

for their services. Interviewees expressed concern over these issues and questioned whether the Legislature fully understood the implications.

#### Training/Education

The final area that was mentioned by all interviewees as a top criminal justice need was training and education for multiple groups of people. Additional training for law enforcement was suggested in the areas of dealing with mentally ill persons and accurately identifying pharmaceutical drugs. Education was suggested for local agencies on resources available for the individuals they serve and for judges on the programming to which they sentence individuals. Finally, many suggested training and education for the General Assembly on the potential effects of legislation that they propose.

### Collaboration

#### Economic Downturn

The declining state of our current economy has forced many agencies and individuals to work together who may not have done so in the past. This includes collaboration across jurisdictions as well as within jurisdictions. According to interviewees, these newfound partnerships are the only way some agencies would remain afloat during a time of scarce resources.

#### Deeper Collaboration

Many interviewees struggled with finding examples of true collaboration. They believed that numerous agencies and organizations say they collaborate and are open to new opportunities to do so. However this frequently turns out to be merely lip service. Interviewees desired to go beyond mere rhetoric and put agency turf and egos aside to establish common ground. When asked how true collaboration might be initiated, interviewees suggested incentivizing collaboration by tying it to funding opportunities.

### Funding

#### Personnel

With operating budgets slashed agencies are being required to do more with less. Interviewees described many situations where their agencies are shorthanded due to new positions and newly vacant positions remaining unfilled. Many law enforcement agencies, prosecutors and defense attorneys are undermanned. This affects public safety and the speed that accused offenders are dealt with. If provided with additional funding, nearly all interviewees indicated they would hire more skilled staff members.

#### Training/Education

Interviewees explained the need for increased training and education as noted above. However they also acknowledged funding to do so is extremely limited or non-existent. Agencies do not have enough money to host trainings or send their staff to trainings, including continuing professional training for law enforcement and general continuing educational opportunities.

### Stringent Nature of Federal Funding

All interviewees agreed that federal funding is necessary for local agencies. However it should be more flexible in nature. Many agencies view federal funding as a burden due to what they perceive to be an excessive amount of red tape and reporting requirements that comes with the award. Interviewees also stated that from year to year the federal allocations to grant programs can be cut without advanced notice or alternative ways to support the personnel and programming toward which the funds were going.

### Data Sharing

#### Fight against Silos

Although this was not a direct question on the interview guide, almost every interviewee brought up their success or troubles with sharing and receiving pertinent information from other agencies. Many believed home-rule issues and a general lack of trust keep more agencies from sharing data with others targeting the same population.

### Specific Area Needs

While interviewees represented different components of the justice system, nearly all of them described needs that span multiple areas of the justice system. The information is organized into the following areas: Victims, Law Enforcement, Courts, Juvenile Justice, Corrections, Treatment, and Other Local/State.

# Victims

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## Top Criminal Justice Needs

For interviewees, keeping victims safe and in violence-free homes is the most important need plaguing the justice system. Housing and economic protections for victims are necessary. Protection orders do not pay bills or cover food for victims. This is why so many domestic violence victims return to their abusers—for survival. Providing more services for ADA individuals and vulnerable populations such as the mentally ill and developmentally disabled, children who witness violence, and elderly victims is vital. Domestic violence and sexual assault services in rural areas should be expanded. Restitution is critical: hold offenders accountable for their actions. Issues also important to interviewees included cyber issues, coordination between systems that serve victims, and accountability for law enforcement and prosecutors in how they handle domestic violence and sexual assault cases. Interviewees asked: “How do we address repeat offenders in an appropriate way?”

## Education/Training

Training is needed for locals and state officials to reduce and prevent victim blaming which is a byproduct of lack of training, support, and burn out. Education is needed for people on the intersection between domestic violence, stalking and homicide. One interviewee believed federal courts do not understand this relationship and were somehow left behind in the educational piece. There is a need for training and proper implementation of current statutes; not necessarily new statutes. Finally, it is important to provide training for smaller agencies in a variety of different ways and forums free of charge.

## Collaboration

Interviewees desire more accountability from funded programs. They believe funded programs should be monitored to ensure they are partnering with other community agencies. The Ohio Attorney General’s Office has a good relationship with associations, state agencies, and local agencies. There is a great set of mentors/national leaders in Ohio and it is important that they are able to provide locals with specific information they need. An example provided was the Ohio Attorney General’s Office Sexual Assault Response Training Team which is comprised of state agency staff and first responders.

## Deficiencies

Some smaller local agencies do not have the infrastructure to write applications and maintain grant funding, yet they are the providers that need access to the money the most. Interviewees noted that there is no consistency in case handling across jurisdictions for victims of crime. There is also no standardization or accountability for Batterer Intervention Programs (BIP); thus anyone can call their program a BIP.

Stalking is underreported and under enforced, and overall stalking victims are undervalued. The role of victim advocates that are community-based (shelter) and systems-based (prosecutor) needs clarified. One individual felt that there have been a few occasions

when the community-based advocates have victims' best interest in mind, while prosecutor-based advocates have the court's best interest in mind.

### Information Sharing

Some suggested creating a hub for program monitoring that would provide state agencies that fund similar local agencies the ability to observe strengths and deficiencies and take these into consideration when grant applications are received. This will allow agencies to be more efficient by not duplicating efforts and being aware of any red flag issues. Monitoring reports would also go into the hub.

Statewide statistics on domestic violence for all 88 counties are needed and this will help drive what is considered evidence-based. Interviewees also noted the need for agencies need to be more transparent about services and needs in addition to increasing connectedness.

### Funding

Interviewees believed shelters and victim programming need to be made a funding a priority so agencies do not have to “jump through hoops” to obtain grant funds. Instead, they should be part of the general operating fund. Continuing Professional Training funds should cover mileage/lodging for program staff. Resources should be allocated for direct services, training, prevention/intervention, investigation, prosecution, meaningful research, and developing programs in small rural areas that lack the infrastructure to do so. These programs should be provided mentoring, technical assistance and follow up to increase their likelihood of success.

Several interviewees felt all federal funding should go through the state administering agency and not the regional planning units (RPU). An alternative to this approach is creating a strategic plan so OCJS will be in a position to control what is funded. The plan should be more focused— not everything should be funded. Additionally, RPUs should be held accountable to stick to the strategic plan. The state then needs to hold locals accountable for addressing the identified priorities. Accordingly, locals should work together based on the plan.

Federal funding needs a maintenance piece—a more permanent funding stream is needed on the prevention/intervention side. Multi-year funding for progressive programs that include safety planning and transitional housing should be established. In general, there needs to be better coordination with federal funding sources; specifically with Justice Assistance Grants, Violence Against Women Act grant dollars, and Family Violence Prevention Services Act dollars.

# Law Enforcement

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The law enforcement category represents the most diverse interviewee perspectives in the entire project. We received feedback from individuals working on the local, county, and state levels. To ensure all information provided is captured as it was intended, some of the sub-categories below are separated into two groups: Local Law Enforcement and State Law Enforcement.

## Top Criminal Justice Needs

Nearly all interviewees believed staffing to be the top need for their particular agency. Agencies would like to hire more officers, deputies, crime analysts, as well as pharmacists and field agents. Increased personnel should take part in enforcement efforts that target both the supply and demand side of the prescription drug abuse epidemic.

Some other needs listed as being important were substance abuse and mental health treatment for offenders, the lack of child advocacy centers, and the lack of diversity—both race and gender—across the justice system. One interviewee was especially concerned with police evidence storage and the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation’s (BCI) caseload growing at a faster rate due to budget cuts on the county level. The cuts will intensify counties reliance on BCI for processing of evidence to help solve crimes.

## Sentencing Reform Concerns

### Local Law Enforcement

Officials representing local law enforcement agencies were concerned that resources are not being allocated to communities to handle the ramifications of HB 86. Many agreed that privatization of prisons and other reforms will not directly increase jail populations; however, it will indirectly impact space due to an increase in non-violent offenders being sentenced to community sanctions. If these options are full, offenders will need to be housed in jails.

Due to current efforts to reduce the prison population, local officials are also concerned there will be no punitive threat for low level offenders who commit crimes such as petty theft. Although the offenses are minor, the individuals committing these types of crimes cause the most headaches in the community for officers.

### State Law Enforcement

One interviewee stated that the most important decision to be made in the justice system is: “Who should and should not be incarcerated?” Another interviewee noted that collateral sanctions are important and should be taken into consideration by judges.

## Collaboration

### Local Law Enforcement

Local law enforcement officials believed that to improve collaboration it is important to rely on technology. The Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway (OHLEG) was listed as helping with collaboration, but it is important to build the infrastructure for increasing technology. Some local law enforcement organizations are diligent in fostering collaboration by hosting district meetings for all six districts in Ohio, including state and federal representatives.

According to some interviewed, the Legislature is difficult to work with. Even though certain organizations have mechanisms in place to inform the Legislature on the effects potential legislation could have, some felt this information is not always utilized.

Finally, for local law enforcement, jurisdictional issues triggered the main point of contention. It was also noted that some Sheriff's Offices are experiencing difficulty working with county coroner's offices due to blurring of roles. A handful of coroner's offices are carrying out their own investigations and making an effort to tell Sheriff's Offices how an individual died in addition to who committed the crime. This causes officials from both parties to step on each other's toes. Collaboration and communication require improvement with other agencies as well, particularly the relationship between the Sheriff's Offices and the Ohio State Highway Patrol.

### State Law Enforcement

Several state officials shared that they would like to work better with federal agencies. Federal agencies were seen as always taking information without sharing it. Many people do not see this changing in the future.

State officials are also experiencing difficulty in certain parts of Ohio when attempting to prosecute offenders involved in pill mills. However, Cuyahoga County was cited as being very aggressive in their prosecution of offenders accused of operating pill mills.

Ohio is a home-rule state so it makes working together difficult; especially with 982 different law enforcement agencies in the state. Interviewees suggested using grant dollars to incentivize working together. Another interviewee shared that when trying to work together it is important to fulfill needs rather than attempt to take over. He also cited the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> as being the driving force behind improving information sharing and working together.

Although interviewees spent a reasonable amount of time discussing their difficult working relationships, they did want to highlight areas that have improved. According to one interviewee, collaboration between local and state agencies is improving. He attributes this to the first prescription drug task force formed under former Governor Strickland's administration. Another individual shared that neighboring counties are utilizing the same DNA labs which cuts down on costs and fosters positive working relationships. Finally, some interviewees believed that human trafficking is the next big issue in Ohio that lends itself to across the board collaborative efforts that include local, state and federal officials. Pill mills and drug task forces are current examples of this collaboration in action.

## Education/Training

Data are needed to inform justice system components including the Legislature and courts. Interviewees believe that anecdotes, rather than data, are often used to incite the Legislature to react to an issue. Educating the Legislature on issues is key. Some local law enforcement organizations focus on getting state and senate representatives to meet with local agencies so that they can better understand the responsibilities of Sheriff's Offices, including running the local jails.

One interviewee believed that law enforcement officials need training on prescription drugs and other newly emerging street drugs. Some felt that in their community, drug task forces are not very active in prescription drug investigations. Others suggested agencies combine funds to increase continuing professional training hours to make officers take them seriously. Education and training was also recommended for locals who are not interested in working together and are not familiar with what state law enforcement agencies do.

## Information Sharing

With the recent passage of HB 93 mandating the use of OARSS (Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System) for pharmacists and physicians, the cost of operation will jump to at least \$1 million per year. OARRS currently costs \$600,000 per year to operate and receives 4,000 requests per week. Ninety-five percent of these requests are automatically generated and five percent need to be reviewed by a pharmacist. A reliable funding source will be needed for this process.

## Information Needed

Both local and state law enforcement officials need more pertinent information to successfully complete their job duties. State officials would like more information from the medical and pharmacy boards regarding pill mills. For some, knowing the number of arrests by all Sheriff's Offices and the number of open beds in Ohio jails is important. For others, having knowledge of potential funding sources, especially grants, was information they would like to have access to. Finally, one individual wanted to stress that having information is always important; however, for officers on the scene, having sensible information is more important than bombarding them with too much information. Some additional information from ODRC might be helpful, but not on the scene.

## Funding

Local police departments and Sheriff's Offices both agree that updated facilities and additional equipment, such as in-car cameras are needed. Funding is also needed to enhance the current DNA testing database and to focus on cybercrimes and other computer-related issues such as investigations involving information contained on cell phones and gaming units. Moreover, money is needed for more personnel to increase the speed with which offenders are dealt.

Interviewees also believed that there must be a balance between treatment, prevention, and enforcement. Funding should be used to educate the general public on

prescription drugs, enforcing prescription drug and heroin abuse, as well as the overall treatment of offenders.

A holistic approach is needed that focuses on juveniles and targeted prevention in communities and schools, the juvenile justice system, and faith-based programs. Interviewees explained that school resource officers and others that do prevention in schools are the first to get cut when law enforcement agencies need to reduce their budget.

Law enforcement officials had opposing viewpoints on the role federal funds should play in local and state agencies. On one hand, some thought federal money is critical to locals. On the other hand, some believed they should not rely on it for sustainability. While critical, federal dollars need to be more flexible to allow locals to target it for their needs.

# Courts

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## Dealing with Offenders

Interviewees from Ohio's courts said the most difficult question to answer when considering top criminal justice needs is, "What should be done with offenders once they are convicted?" Most were proponents of shifting appropriate offenders from prison to the community; however, they believed resources for community programs need to be shifted as well. All community-based services need support and not just community-based correctional facilities. Community services selected need to be evidence-based and proven to work. According to one interviewee, treating individuals in the community would clear 7,000 people out of prisons and jails who are nothing more than minor drug users.

When discussing the treatment of offenders, interviewees believed services offered should focus on the frequent users of the system and be more holistic encompassing their mental health, substance abuse, education, and housing needs. This was especially noted in Ohio's Appalachian counties. One interviewee estimated that 75 percent of offenders do not receive the treatment they need. She also believed that judges should not be social workers and choose treatment curricula for offenders. They should simply be team leaders and emphasize that some kind of treatment is necessary.

It is important to focus on the demand side of drugs instead of just the supply side. Unless the demand side is reduced or eliminated there will always be people available to supply the drugs. Finally, treatment should be available for people who need it without having to be convicted of a felony prior to receiving services. It should be available throughout the entire process (pre-, during, and post-) and not just once an individual is incarcerated.

## Education

Law enforcement as well as judges should receive better information on resources that are available for offender intervention services because not all judges are aware of resources such as the Ohio Benefit Bank and grant funding opportunities. Education is also needed so everyone fully understands the ramifications of collateral sanctions for those convicted of crimes. To help with this need, the Public Defenders' Office is in the process of creating a database to help judges and prosecutors understand the collateral consequences of being convicted of a felony.

Interviewees felt the Legislature would benefit from receiving additional information on the impact of potential new legislation. Currently judicial impact statements are provided following the introduction of a new bill. However it would be beneficial to have impact statements from outside agencies to educate law makers on the impact of proposed legislation. Agencies such as the Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH), the National Alliance on Mental Illness and the Office of Criminal Justice Services were suggested as examples of agencies that could produce impact statements. Education for legislators also needs to cover evidence-based programs and practices. The value of research is high because everyone needs to know what is evidence-based when sending those needing services to programs.

Interviewees believed it is important for agencies to counteract media messages that provoke quick emotional responses to issues. Instead, responses should focus on the costs/benefit of spending money on prevention instead of solely being reactionary.

## Sentencing Reform Concerns

The burden to reduce the number of incarcerated individuals is being shifted from the state to the community and local alternative programming needs to have an increase in funding to handle the increase in demand. An example specific to prosecutor caseloads was provided regarding theft. The threshold for theft has been increased and will cause municipal courts to see an increase in their caseloads while county prosecutor's offices will experience a decrease due to sentencing reforms.

## Collaboration

Those interviewed found that without historical or institutional knowledge the likelihood of legislators listening to the courts' recommendations is significantly reduced. Some think this makes having a professional relationship with the Legislature difficult.

One interviewee noted that prior to the formation of ACMIC (Advisory Committee on Mentally Ill in the Courts) people from different agencies did not interact with one another. ACMIC has done a good job of improving working relations by opening lines of communication and inviting every appropriate party to the table. It was also suggested that a team approach and cross training be used to solve problems. Finally, interviewees suggested considering a county-based focus and incentivize working together as a state.

Some interviewees believe there are legislators who view the Public Defenders antagonistically due to their fear of being labeled "soft on crime" if they establish a working relationship with agencies that may have opposing viewpoints. To overcome this it is important to search for and identify commonalities between agencies that do not historically work together. One example provided was a working relationship between the Ohio Attorney General's Office, Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys' Association, and the Ohio Public Defender's Office on the cost of court filings.

## Information Needed

Information sharing is difficult because at times there is a lack of trust between agencies. Until each agency sees the value in sharing data, information sharing will not happen or will continue to be a struggle. Some found that personal relationships tend to spur collaboration and sharing because there is a familiarity and trust level. It was suggested that statewide statistical data need to be available on all criminal cases. Not having access to data hampers the ability for sound decisions to be made. One interviewee explained that the Ohio Courts' Network (OCN) will not address the issue of having statewide statistical data because access to OCN is restricted and not available to the public.

## Funding

Interviewees believed funding should be allocated to a variety of different areas. Some believed that funds need to be spent on intervention with children in schools and the juvenile court system with mentoring being crucial. RECLAIM was again suggested as a

model that can be used in the adult system if it is correctly translated so judges can target the money to the greatest needs. Early childhood education reform was also listed as a need to which funding should be directed. Additional personnel, equipment, and staff training were also needs that interviewees would like to see funding address. For one interviewee, the high prevalence of guns, drugs, and gangs present him with the most challenges and having adequate resources to address them is a constant struggle.

Some stated that answers for the problems the system is currently plagued with can be found in local agencies and communities that need federal funding to operate. Even though funding is greatly needed, interviewees stressed the importance of having monitoring components in place to ensure program accountability. Federal funding should be used to fund programs that otherwise would not exist and to fund special projects such as human trafficking investigation.

Others thought that federal funds should provide baseline support for existing programs. Distribution of federal grant funding should be systemic—fund the program in addition to the collateral effects of the program. Some expressed difficulty obtaining Byrne/JAG funding and felt there is a lack of funding for indigent defense training which is greatly needed. Uniformity is needed when determining costs of defense for each county because there are potentially 88 different costs of defense with many counties paying high costs for relatively small case loads.

One interviewee shared that Veterans' Courts have the ability to bring in a lot of funding to assist these individuals and this would ultimately take some of the financial burden off of mental health and drug courts. Also, all funded Crisis Intervention Team training programs should have a veteran's component.

# Juvenile Justice

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## Treatment

Mental health needs are paramount for youth housed in DYS facilities with approximately 54 percent of DYS-involved youth having a mental health diagnosis and/or receiving treatment. When a youth is being treated, service providers need to view the youth's family more holistically—the definition of family should be expanded to encompass all those individuals that influence the youth's life once they are released from the institution.

## Education

Education serves as the second most important need for DYS following mental health needs. Youth that obtain their GED need to have additional meaningful education opportunities available while still in the institutions. DYS is currently exploring beginning training in specific trades that can provide youth with skills that may be used once they are released back into the community. The department is also in the process of offering SAT and ACT preparatory courses and tests for youth that have completed all educational courses offered in the institutions. Additionally, programming offered by the faith-based community in the institutions needs to be increased.

## Reentry

Steps for reentry need to begin on the first day a youth is admitted. This includes issuing them with identification cards for their release. DYS is in the process of forging relationships with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) for Medicare/Medicaid for youth once they are released. One major advance is that Medicaid is now suspended, rather than terminated, for youth once they are incarcerated. This makes reinstating benefits once released increasingly easier.

Another part of the reentry process is placing youth in the least restrictive setting and keeping the family involved throughout the entire process leading up to reentry into the community. One interviewee believed that judges should have discretion to review a youth's progress and get them out of institutions sooner. The Ohio Youth Assessment Survey (OYAS) has been a great addition because it is being used by all 88 Ohio counties. Between the years 2006 – 2011, DYS commitments have been reduced from 1,800 to 753 with an average length of stay of 11 months.

## Collaboration

As noted by numerous interviewees, DYS has done an excellent job with achieving collaboration, with the juvenile court judges in particular. Collaboration has increased due to resources being limited. DYS serves youth that are also being served by other agencies such as the Ohio Department of Mental Health and ODJFS so it is imperative that communication and collaboration take place. It is important to work with each other instead of against. RECLAIM has forced partnership between the community, DYS, and the courts. Some believed this is an approach that should be adopted by the adult justice

system. Increasing collaborative efforts will also cut down on barriers to information that currently exists as many agencies do not want to share their information.

## Funding

Funding should be used to address the mental health needs of DYS-involved youth and to enhance RECLAIM. The initiative has been successful, but more can always be done and DYS would like to focus on lower-level youth. Funds should also be allocated to staff training and increasing the number and quality of DYS personnel.

# Corrections

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## System Improvement

When asked to list the most pressing needs in the justice system, interviewees noted that the current justice system is not cohesive and there needs to be an integrated continuum stretching from an individual's initial point of contact with law enforcement to their reentry back into society. The continuum of evidence-based programs and sanctions should be established to keep people out of prison and shorten their stays if prison is necessary. An important component in this continuum should be an increased focus on implementing evidence-based principles and programs. This includes assessing offenders, placing them in appropriate programming, and adequate follow-up procedures.

Those interviewed stressed the need for the correctional system to be data-driven and employ one universal assessment instrument for offenders. Researchers find it difficult to complete outcome studies to improve the evidence base due to data collection issues at agencies. Jurisdictions should be provided help in developing databases that are capable of collecting pertinent program data. To this end, one interviewee suggested a program of select large Ohio colleges establishing extension services to help locals with problems or concerns in their communities. This free-of-charge technical assistance would offer information on available evidence-based practices to local agencies providing direct services to clients.

## Sentencing Reform

Interviewees spent much of their time discussing the pending sentencing reform legislation which was signed into law on June 29, 2011. The main goal of the sentencing reform is to move low-level non-violent offenders out of prison facilities and into communities for treatment.

Violence in Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) facilities has substantially increased due to facilities being 132 percent over capacity. Some believe the idea of treating all offenders the same needs to be replaced with differential treatment based on an individual's risk of violence and needs.

According to those interviewed, probation services are fragmented and dysfunctional. Standards need to be improved, especially since most offenders are on probation. When discussing transitional control, some interviewees felt the need for discretion to be taken away from judges and given to the Director of ODRC to make decisions dependent on a series of criteria which are operational in nature. Finally, some feel all community-based correctional facilities should have day reporting.

## Collaboration

In this category, two programs were offered as examples of good collaboration. One is the Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) for their implementation of RECLAIM. The other is the Toledo Reentry Coalition that does an excellent job of consistently having every appropriate party at the table when making decisions. Interviewees stated that collaboration needs to occur at the beginning of initiatives instead of midway through or at the conclusion. Some believe the Ohio Sentencing Commission has the potential to do great

things with the agencies and individuals assembled; however interviewees would like to see the Commission elicit recommendations or opinions on justice issues.

## Funding

When asked what areas funding should be allocated to, interviewees believed a portion should be used to fix or develop data systems for the entire justice system. They also stressed the importance of strategic planning initiatives that establish guiding principles, and all funded programs should be required to fit with the established principles. If a proposed program, policy, or idea does not coincide with the guiding principles derived from the planning process it should not receive funding. Such an initiative must begin with the Legislature to ensure success. The DYS RECLAIM initiative was provided as an example of relying on established principles as only evidence-based programs receive funding under the RECLAIM initiative.

Interviewees believed federal dollars should continue to play an active role in local programs; however, money should be given to states and allow them to decide where the greatest needs exist since the federal government is not aware of local needs.

# Treatment

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Many interviewees agreed that untreated or ineffectively treated disorders lead individuals to cycle through the system. A Fairfield County Drug Court study found that 90 percent of opiate users were repeat offenders. Research shows that focusing on mental health and substance abuse services for offenders lowers recidivism; however community-based services are always the first to get cut and by the largest amounts.

## Drug Courts

One interviewee emphasized that Ohio's challenge now is to help specialized dockets achieve their full potential. Intervention needs to focus on the correct issues. Individuals should receive an assessment prior to being enrolled in a drug court. Additionally, relapse should be seen as a disease issue and not strictly enforcement and the consequence shouldn't necessarily be program termination.

## Education

It is important for judges to understand addiction. Some judges view addiction as an issue of a lack of personal control as opposed to a disease.

## Community Investment

Many interviewees said investing in the community saves on long term costs. Reentry services, including community supports, are lacking for severely mentally ill individuals. There are restrictions on who providers can take in regards to housing. Reentry coalitions should assist in this decision making process.

Collaboration with other state agencies should occur to forge community supports. Community teams (Assertive Community Treatment) should be supported through mini-grants. The Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH) encouraged state-level investment in community-level pilot projects that focus on a particular issue. It is too difficult to tackle the entire state on a particular issue, but if agencies can build on smaller scale successes in the community, this would be a good starting point.

## Information Systems

There is a dislocation between data systems especially on the local/community level. There needs to be a standardized dataset for jails and clerk of courts. For research purposes, common data elements should be collected to make aggregating data easier. Statewide recidivism data (return to prison) is easy to access. However, interviewees explained that obtaining local data on recidivism is more difficult. A universal and consistent definition of recidivism needs to be created.

Additional information is needed on emerging trends in sentencing. Gaps in information sharing exist between people in specialty docket courts and the communities that provide services. Some interviewees explained that HIPAA concerns exist regarding information sharing and questioned if the cost/benefit of sharing is worth having one large dataset as was suggested by interviewees in other categories.

## Evidence-based Focus

According to the interviewees, providers have not fully embraced using evidence-based practices and programs. One interviewee noted that in his community, Treatment Alternatives to Street Crime is the only system that can serve the entire population. Smaller agencies serving 30 people or less are considered “boutique programs.” One interviewee shared that generally substance abuse and mental health agencies display resistance to individualized programs and concentrate on making their clients feel better instead of focusing on cognitive restructuring. Training is needed to build capacity to provide evidence-based treatment services on a larger scale.

## Collaboration

Multiple interviewees believe the state never gets collaboration right—they collaborate on the surface but not on a deeper level. Partnership between the local and state levels needs to strike a balance by identifying best practices in the community and removing silos. Interviewees found that local agencies/communities drift due to lack of direction, misdirection, or countering direction from states. In many situations, politics prevent commonsense solutions.

Excluding reentry coalitions, community planning as a whole has gone backwards.

As stated throughout all other categories, collaboration is encouraged in response to limited resources, but in fact collaboration is becoming more fragmented due to competition for the scarce resources. In order for meaningful collaboration to take place there needs to be a clear plan from the community, on the county board level, and then funding should be directly aligned to the plan. If this is done, service providers will be onboard, but people need incentives. Regional Planning Units (RPUs) are seen as having become grantor agencies and not planning units. Some interviewed do not see coordination or documents coming out of the RPUs. Reentry coalitions can help; however, they lack stabilized funding.

Services for veterans other than Veteran’s Courts are not on the radar of many communities planning. The gap exists because Veteran’s Courts assist those honorably discharged, but who helps those less honorably discharged?

Several interviewees wanted to highlight the good working relationships they have with other state agencies on opiate issues, overall grant activity, and emerging issues.

## Miscellaneous

The fact that probation and parole services are overwhelmed and lack oversight was echoed through this category. One interviewee also described the difficulties of dealing with individuals deemed incompetent to stand trial. In these cases, judges should be given discretion on the placement of offenders. House Bill 153 will give ODMH the ability to make recommendations to judges to have discretion over the length of stays for individuals deemed incompetent.

## Funding

Some interviewees shared ideas of making the most of the limited resources that are available. The Indigent Driver Alcohol Treatment fund goes to pay for substance abuse treatment for offenders. One interviewee suggested creating a funding partnership to increase usage of these dollars which are currently housed by the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (ODADAS).

As a general rule, many believed that for every dollar spent on supervision and confinement, an equal amount should be spent on community-based services.

The treatment category is the first place where we were told that federal funds should play a stabilizing role for local agencies and provide infrastructure through state administering agencies. This individual believes that an agency cannot be innovative without a stable program base. Other interviewees shared that community non-Medicaid services are used by local boards for priorities/needs in their own communities. They are utilized to provide support for those without medical insurance.

When there are cuts to different systems of care the effect of those budget reductions need to be considered in the context of their compounding effects. When reductions occur at ODMH, ODADAS, and ODRC many times individuals receiving services are involved in multiple systems and uniquely impacted by cuts.

When introducing legislation that increases costs, the sponsor should be required to identify where the money is coming from to support the efforts.

# Other Local/State

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## Top Criminal Justice Needs

Interviewees believed that the increasing number of inmates and the lack of available space to house them was a major concern. Healthcare for inmates presents a major cost to counties. General Revenue Funds have decreased while some have been required to hire more personnel to meet jail standards. Also, the cost for public defenders is increasing due to increases in indigent persons. This was echoed by the Ohio Public Defenders' Office.

Interviewees also shared communication concerns: everyone operates in their own silos and improvement is needed among stakeholders to eliminate duplication of efforts and to increase coordination.

## Reentry

The importance of family in an offender's reentry process was noted by several interviewees. The dosage of family contact and programs should increase prior to an offender's release. Service providers need to make sure they are providing the offender and the family with something that adds value to their lives. Some believed that local churches need to be involved earlier in the process with prison ministry.

Barriers to employment need to be addressed. An interviewee suggested passing a statute that grants immunity from lawsuits to employers who hire ex-offenders. Currently employers are reluctant to hire ex-offenders due to the liabilities they present. ODRC should issue rehabilitation certificates to those offenders who successfully complete treatment upon exit from the institution that could be presented to potential employers.

Collateral consequences of sentences also need to be addressed. For example, suspension of a driver's license due to non-payment of support hinders an offender's ability to legally drive to work and may cause loss of employment which will not achieve the ultimate goal of successful payment of support.

Mentoring from faith-based community organizations should be provided to those involved in opiate usage and their families, since approximately 90 percent of users relapse. Including the family in such programs reduces the likelihood of relapse.

## Sentencing Reform Concerns

As many others mentioned, interviewees were concerned about the impact sentencing reform will have on jails. The question was asked: "Who pays for legislation?" Unfunded mandates tax local governmental funds and there is not enough outcome-based thinking on the sentencing reform. The cost analysis must include costs at the local level. Anyone in the Legislature who introduces a sentencing bill should have independent verification of cost and identify the funding source. Legislators should not rely solely on the Legislative Service Commission for this information. Finally, improvement is needed for funding for local probation departments.

## Collaboration

Collaboration helps fiscally by making more tools available to more individuals, and ultimately increases public safety. Collaboration between community services and counties is great because of the need to be more efficient in times where resources are scarce. The only reason some agencies exist is through collaboration with adjoining counties. For example, Madison County utilizes a five-county juvenile facility. A broader example of this is the creation of reentry coalitions. Reentry coalitions provide tools for both law enforcement and the community and bring people together to reduce recidivism. Collaboration should begin with the Legislature. However, according to one individual, too many politicians see compromise as weakness, and as a result politics is failing government.

State agencies should increase their involvement with locals on the community level and increase mentoring opportunities for locals. An interviewee suggested using local Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) boards as an avenue to achieve this.

The Judicial Conference brings together Ohio judges to make improvements in the courts and the administration of justice and serves as a successful example of collaboration. According to interviewees, it is greatly unappreciated.

When expressing collaborative difficulties, some felt organizations are antagonistic toward ODRC and should develop trust in ODRC's motives and attempt to build a rapport. Likewise, some prosecutors are reluctant to hear any opinions or ideas different from their own because they do not want to be accused of being "soft on crime."

## Information Needed

Sharing of data among job and family services and locals is lacking. Data are needed to address specific local needs because some community agencies are not aware of what is available and where to go to find it. It may be valuable to provide information and education to where to find community resources.

## Education/Training

Interviewees believed that law enforcement need a better understanding of mental health issues and this can be achieved by increasing training. The importance of educating the Legislature on a host of issues was also noted. Interpretation of data for the Legislature and judges is needed to make them understand the data to improve spending and decision making. Legislators would not propose legislation to continually cut mental health funding if they understood how mental health issues affect the justice system. There needs to be a focus on educating the judiciary especially on mental health and substance abuse. Changing offender behavior is not a cookie cutter approach.

## Funding

Funding should only respond to absolute needs. Funding should be spent first in planning and assessments. Research is needed to identify real, not perceived, needs. Provide appropriate assessment tools and increase efforts to move grantees in the direction of using only evidence-based programs and principles. Training, post-training, and supportive efforts (skill training follow ups/check-ins) should be funded.

Decision makers forget local communities are struggling not only with programming, but with infrastructure needs including transportation, human services, and buildings. Many facilities are not in state compliance and counties do not have enough resources to become compliant.

Funding should be used to strengthen probation by increasing training and creating and enforcing professional standards. Funding to ODMH, ODADAS, and overall reentry efforts needs to be increased. The quality and amount of prison programming needs to be improved and be rehabilitative in nature.

According to one interviewee, Medicaid dollars are vital to counties and county government would be unable to function without receiving them. Federal funding has strings attached and can always be taken away; therefore, locals should be careful relying on federal funds. Interviewees generally believed those in the federal government do not care about program outcomes, but simply whether or not the required paperwork is completed correctly.

## Next Steps

Following the conclusion of the core group interviews in late June, OCJS began the process of developing a comprehensive survey that would be distributed statewide to those individuals working “on the ground” daily at all points of the criminal justice system including consumers. The survey consists of both general questions on Ohio’s criminal justice needs and questions specific to components of the justice system. The findings will assist in more effective use of Byrne/JAG funds as well as other programs OCJS administers.

The final step in the strategic planning process is our strategic planning conference in November. The conference will provide those in attendance the opportunity to discuss and digest all of the information received from the interviews and survey responses while providing solutions to the needs expressed. This is also a time to learn about evidence-based programming that is already being implemented throughout the state and the difference it is making.

The strategic plan will cover Ohio’s priority justice system needs and discuss the role of federal and state grant programs in addressing those needs. We want to emphasize that this process is not a one-shot deal. OCJS will be regularly completing the strategic planning process to make sure we remain abreast of the needs of Ohioans and adequately address them with new, innovative, and data-driven programs and practices.