November 11, 2008

Open Letter to the American Society of Criminology:

The recent election of a new President and the advent of the 111th Congress present an unprecedented opportunity for the nation to rethink the federal role in promoting research on crime, society’s responses to crime, and the administration of justice.

For the past forty years, the nation’s research and statistics agencies -- the National Institute of Justice and the Bureau of Justice Statistics -- have been housed within the Office of Justice Programs of the Department of Justice. Having served as Director of the National Institute of Justice from 1994-2000, I have a firsthand understanding of the valuable role that NIJ has played in promoting research that has benefited our nation’s criminal justice system. Yet I have come to the conclusion that the current structure of the Department of Justice, which places responsibility for criminal justice research and statistics in a program-oriented office, cannot provide the rigorous, objective, timely and relevant research on crime and justice to which our citizens, and the practitioners in the law enforcement and criminal justice professions, are entitled.

The purpose of this Open Letter is to urge members of the American Society of Criminology, as well as members of other associations of professionals in criminal justice, to support a new structure that would better carry out the research and statistical obligations of the federal government. Specifically, I propose that the Congress create, with support from the new Administration, a new office in the Department of Justice, called the Office of Justice Research, to be headed by an Assistant Attorney General for Justice Research. This office would be separate from the Office of Justice Programs, which would continue to administer the funding programs that support reform efforts by state and local law enforcement and criminal justice agencies. Other cabinet agencies -- the Department of Education, the Department of Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency -- have all recently created research and statistics offices that are more professional and independent. Now is the time for the Department of Justice to follow these examples.

The argument for creation of the new Office of Justice Research, separate from the Office of Justice Programs, is very straightforward: if the research, statistics, and scientific development functions of the federal government are located within an office that is primarily responsible for the administration of assistance programs, three risks are created. First, the scientific integrity of the research functions is vulnerable to compromise. Second, the research and development function will never be given the priority treatment that is needed to meet the enormous crime challenges facing the country. Third, the research agenda on crime and justice will more likely reflect short-term, programmatic needs rather than the long-term need to develop a better understanding of the phenomenon of crime in America and the best ways to prevent and respond to crime.
Justice Programs. Because OJP is responsible for managing substantial federal assistance programs, the
Office of Justice Programs is a major player in the Nation’s justice system.

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) is the executive arm of the Department of Justice that manages 10 programs, which include

- The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)
- The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS)
- The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS)
- The Office on Victims of Crime (OVCS)
- The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)
- The Office of State Crime Information Centers (OSCIC)
- The Office of Victims of Crime (OVAC)
- The Office of Justice Programs (OJP)
- The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)
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These programs are funded by the Department of Justice and provide assistance to state and local governments, law enforcement agencies, and non-profit organizations. The Office of Justice Programs is responsible for ensuring that funds are used effectively and efficiently.

Challenges:

1. Limited Data: The Office of Justice Programs has limited access to data that could help evaluate the effectiveness of its programs. This is a significant challenge because data is essential for making informed decisions and improving program outcomes.

2. Resource Allocation: The Office of Justice Programs has limited resources to allocate to different programs and initiatives. This can lead to competing priorities and limited success in achieving the goals of each program.

3. Program Complexity: The Office of Justice Programs has a wide range of programs and initiatives, which can make it challenging to coordinate and evaluate their effectiveness.

4. Limited Funding: The Office of Justice Programs relies on funding from the Department of Justice, which can be limited and subject to political influences.

5. Limited Capacity: The Office of Justice Programs has limited capacity to implement and evaluate new programs and initiatives. This can lead to missed opportunities and inefficiencies in program delivery.

The Office of Justice Programs is committed to addressing these challenges and improving the effectiveness of its programs. The Office of Justice Programs is working to improve data collection and analysis, increase resources and capacity, and prioritize program evaluation and improvement.

The Office of Justice Programs is an important player in the Nation’s justice system, and its success is critical to ensuring that justice programs are effective and efficient.
Although the National Institute of Justice, and the National Institute of Justice Technology, research and development are central to the mission of the Office of Justice Research, the Office of Justice Research would be comprised of the Assistant Attorney General in this position would bring to the position an extensive background in the field of criminal justice, experience conducting and overseeing research in this field, and the position of the National Institute of Justice Office of Research and Information Management, one is placed on those issues that are of critical importance to the Office of Justice, and to the Office of the Assistant Attorney General of the Department of Justice. The Office of Justice Research would be headed by an Assistant Attorney General nominated by the President and confirmed by the United States Senate. The new Office of Justice Research would be headed by an Assistant Attorney General nominated by the President and confirmed by the United States Senate. The new Office of Justice Research would be headed by an Assistant Attorney General nominated by the President and confirmed by the United States Senate.

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The National Institute of Justice Technology would perform the functions that were carried out by the Office of Justice and Technology. The National Institute of Justice would promote and facilitate the development of research related to crime prevention and control. The National Institute of Justice would also provide training and technical assistance to law enforcement agencies, as well as to other agencies that support crime prevention and control. The National Institute of Justice would coordinate with other federal agencies and organizations involved in crime prevention and control to ensure a coordinated approach to these efforts.

In the past, the Office of Justice and Technology had been responsible for coordinating the development of new technologies and methods for crime prevention and control. The National Institute of Justice would be responsible for ensuring that these technologies and methods are adopted and implemented effectively. The National Institute of Justice would also be responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of these efforts.

The National Institute of Justice would work closely with the Office of Justice and Technology to ensure a seamless transition of responsibilities. The National Institute of Justice would continue to support research and development in crime prevention and control, as well as to provide training and technical assistance to law enforcement agencies.
time to engage these important issues and to improve our capacity to promote research on crime and
criminal justice. I would hope there is consensus that we need to move beyond the status quo. Now is the
right moment to galvanize the academic and policy communities around how best to structure the nation's research and statistical programs in the
field.

Next steps. It is my hope that this letter will generate a lively debate within the Justice policy and the

principles flowing directly to the Attorneys General. We would recognize that crime is now a

criminal injustice agencies would benefit from scientific developments in these other Federal agencies.

Department of Defense, NASA, and the Department of Energy. In this way, the law enforcement and