Warrant and Disposition Management

Assessment of Wisconsin's PROTECT System

September 2012

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I.   INTRODUCTION

One of the most intractable challenges in state and local justice has been the reporting of criminal dispositions and arrest warrants from the courts to the state criminal history repositories. States vary widely in the degree to which such reporting is complete, timely, and accurate. That variation, in turn, affects the completeness of national records at the FBI and the quality of searches done by local law enforcement agencies. Ultimately, incomplete criminal history repositories put officer safety in jeopardy, weaken the nation's ability to investigate and prosecute criminal activity, and diminish the ability of courts and corrections to implement appropriate sanctions and reentry paths for convicted offenders.

Because state court systems vary so much and because their information sharing capabilities also vary significantly, it is not possible to develop one standard action plan or implementation strategy for everyone that is meaningful and practical. Further, each state differs in the maturity of its state-level integrated criminal justice system and its governance. Finally, the criminal history repositories in each state also exhibit a wide range of technical architectures and capabilities. Given this environment, the only practical approach is to assess the situation in each individual state and produce action plans that are tailored to their unique situation. This report summarizes the unique disposition issues found in the state of Wisconsin.

II.   WISCONSIN'S STATEWIDE PROSECUTOR'S SYSTEM

In the mid-1990s, the Bureau of Justice Information System (BJIS) was created in Wisconsin to examine ways the justice system could improve the flow of information to stakeholders through the improved use of technology. BJIS worked with the courts, prosecutors and law enforcement to identify a number of potential improvement areas but ultimately prioritized addressing the lack of standardization among prosecutors. Using federal Bryne dollars, Wisconsin began developing a statewide prosecutor's system which became known as PROTECT (PROsecutor TEChnology for Case Tracking). It took approximately two years of planning to develop the PROTECT system and eight years to roll the system statewide as it was a voluntary system. Funding for the program long-term comes from court fees.

III.   FUNDING/STAFFING

The ongoing maintenance of PROTECT is funded by a court fee (imposed on both criminal and civil cases) known as the Justice Information Fee. The 2012 fee was set at $21.50, of which $7.50 goes to BJIS. The annual budget to support PROTECT is $4.5 million which supports the applications, hardware, software, and T1 High speed connectivity for 1,300 customers. No user fees are charged.

Currently there are 16.2 FTEs allocated through the legislature and 7 contractors to support end users in 71 counties statewide in Wisconsin. Staff manage physical equipment, perform customized development, manage interfaces, provide training, and provide support for the help desk.

IV.   INTERFACES

PROTECT interfaces with Wisconsin's Circuit Courts for electronic case filing and the sharing of court calendar information (the C-CAP Interface). Information from PROTECT is sent to initiate a case in C-CAP. C-CAP pushes data back to PROTECT such as information related to the scheduling of court

appearances, assignment of defense attorneys, dispositions, etc. The system is designed to interface with Outlook to populate schedules.

There are also interfaces with the Wisconsin Department of Justice for the electronic update of No Prosecute decisions from the District Attorney; with Wisconsin's State Patrol for the electronic transfer and streamlined intake of criminal traffic citations to the DA's office (eCitation) and with several participating county law enforcement agencies for the electronic transfer and intake of police reports from the referring agency to the DA office (eReferral).

Via web services, the DA Inter-County Query allows secure look-up of PROTECT person and case information by member DA Network offices.

Authorized users of the WIJIS Justice Gateway can also view prosecutor data from PROTECT databases across the state via a secure website hosted by the Office of Justice Assistance (OJA) that allows the searching for suspect and case data contained in PROTECT databases and law enforcement systems across the state.

V.   GOVERNANCE

Wisconsin worked in partnership with the Wisconsin District Attorneys Association (WDAA) on the development of the PROTECT project. The WDAA has an Executive Board that is elected by the membership and an IT Steering Committee which is a 10 person advisory body. During the roll-out of PROTECT, the WDAA IT Steering Committee met quarterly in person; later the committee met by teleconference, and now it is ad hoc and meets two to three times per year. There is also a PROTECT user group that was developed when PROTECT was being redesigned. The PROTECT user group is now

used to prioritize enhancement requests and advise on redesigns of the application.

VI.   LESSONS LEARNED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROTECT

- Grants are not the best way to fund staff as it is difficult to bring people in to do short-term projects. It has been ideal, over time, to have developers who have a greater understanding of how the system operates.
- Wisconsin chose to provide localities with the infrastructure to support the PROTECT system. Managing the infrastructure has benefits such as the ability to maintain the security of the network and lock-down the system when needed. However, it is also a big part of the expense of the system.

VII.   OTHER CHALLENGES IN DISPOSITION REPORTING IN WISCONSIN

While having the PROTECT system has addressed some of the challenges others states experience, Wisconsin still has challenges with reporting dispositions. Wisconsin uses an Arrest Tracking Number (ATN) to link arrests to dispositions. Local law enforcement agencies sometimes reuse ATNs or accidentally create a second transaction control number (TCN) by:

- Hitting the "transmit" button several times accidentally;
- Having two different agencies fingerprint an arrestee on the same arrest (e.g. police agency and jail both fingerprint); or
- Law enforcement forgets to add a charge when entering the information and goes back and adds the charge and resubmits all the charges.

The courts ensure that new clerks receive training about the ATN. The Clerk's staff is trained to look at the audit reports and see if disposition records were successfully transferred. If not, the clerks are to check and see if they received a fingerprint card and, if so, key in the ATN. Several years ago CIB received a grant to train courts, law enforcement and prosecutors on disposition reporting. The training effort was successful, but with staff turnover some of that knowledge was not sustained.