



# Research Bulletin

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## Criminal history record series

# Results of the 2003 Criminal History Record Information Audit

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The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority conducts periodic audits of the Criminal History Record Information (CHRI) system to assess the accuracy, timeliness, and completeness of criminal history records, while ensuring compliance with federal guidelines. Audit findings and recommendations provide the Illinois State Police (ISP) with objective information to make improvements in the develop-

The CHRI audit provided a report card on the state's progress toward compliance with federal reporting standards.

ment, operation, and administration of the CHRI reporting program. This article summarizes the methodology, findings, and recommendations for improving the quality of the CHRI reporting program as detailed in the Authority's *2003 Criminal History Records Information Audit Report*.

### *Audit information*

The audit focused on the following areas of the CHRI program:

- **Accuracy** of ISP's Computerized Criminal History (CCH) database system records compared to source documents provided by local agencies.
- **Timeliness** in which local agencies submit required criminal history information to the state system, and the timeliness of processing that information at ISP.
- **Completeness** of the criminal history information included on the CCH record.
- **Flagging** the records of convicted felons.

Funding for the audit was provided by the U.S. Department of Justice through the Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Program. Under the Crime Control Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-647), all



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Figure 1  
Reporting requirements for the audit time period 1994-1998

An Arrest Fingerprint Card must be submitted to the Illinois State Police Bureau of Identification for adults arrested for the following charges:

- Any felony charge.
- Class A misdemeanor.
- Class B misdemeanor.
- 625 Illinois Compiled Statutes 5.0-4 (Motor vehicle anti-theft laws).
- 625 Illinois Compiled Statutes 5.0/11-204.1 (Aggravated fleeing or attempt to elude a police officer).

Charges that are not mandated to be reported include:

- Any traffic violations except those mentioned above.
- Illinois Compiled Statutes 5.0/11-501(a) 1(d) 2 (Driving under the influence of alcohol, other drug, or combination of both).
- Conservation offenses as defined in the Supreme Court Rule.
- 501(c) that are classified as Class B misdemeanors.

An Arrest Fingerprint Card must also be submitted for *juveniles* who are arrested or taken into custody for the following charges:

- Unlawful use of weapons under Section 24-1 of the Criminal Code of 1961.
- Forcible felonies as defined in Section 2-8 of the Criminal Code of 1961.
- Class 2 or greater felony under the Cannabis Control Act.
- Class 2 or greater felony under the Illinois Controlled Substances Act.
- Chapter 4 of the Illinois Vehicle Code (anti-theft laws).
- All criterion offenses applicable to adults (above) where the court has decided to try the juvenile as an adult.

states receiving Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Assistance Formula Grant funds are required to allocate at least 5 percent of their total award toward improvement of criminal history records until certain requirements, established by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, are met.

The requirements dictate, in part, that states must ensure that:

- 95 percent of felony arrest records and fingerprints initiated with an arrest during the last year are complete.
- 95 percent of current felony arrests records contain disposition information, if a disposition has been reached.
- 95 percent of current sentences to and releases from prison are available.

- 95 percent of current arrest records identify felonies.

The audit provides a BJA report card on Illinois' progress toward compliance with these federal standards (Table 1).

#### *Background*

ISP administers the state central repository for CHRI by compiling, maintaining, and disseminating the records. Criminal history records, commonly referred as "rap sheets", are a chronological compilation of arrest charges, state's attorney and court dispositions, sentences, and incarceration status of an individual who commits a felony or class A and B misdemeanor in Illinois, and the information is supported by fingerprint identification of the subject. CHRI is reported to ISP by criminal justice agencies responsible for processing individuals through the criminal justice system in accordance with the reporting requirements

Table 1  
Bureau of Justice Assistance report card on CHRI in Illinois

BJA Standard	Illinois results
<b>Timeliness of mailed CCH submissions, 2001</b>	
ISP must post all felony arrests within 30 days of receipt to CCH.	Posted within 30 days: 7% Posted within 31-60 days: 61%
ISP must post all non-felony CHRI within 90 days of receipt.	Arrest posted: 73% State's attorney posted: 41% Court disposition posted: 10% Custodial status posted: 87%
Local agencies must report all fingerprint submissions to ISP within 24 hours of arrest.	Submitted within four days: 26% Submitted within five to 10 days: 39% Submitted after 10 days: 35%
<b>Completeness of CCH records created between 1994 and 1998</b>	
Disposition and incarceration information in 90 percent of felony arrests must be posted.	State's attorney posted: 85% Court disposition posted: 74% Custodial status posted: 97%
Dispositions in 95 percent of current felony records must be posted.	74%
CHRI on 95 percent of current sentences to and releases from prison must be available.	Custodial status: 97%
90 percent of felonies must be flagged with a felony convictions status indicator in the database.	Conviction status indicator other than "Pending or Unknown": 79%
<b>Other CCH database improvements</b>	
Automate all CHRI, including master fingerprint cards.	Master fingerprint cards transformed into an automated form: 100%
Automate all new CHRI files.	New files maintained in an automated form: 100%

set forth in the Criminal Identification Act [20ILCS2630].

CHRI is collected, maintained, and disseminated via the Computerized Criminal History (CCH) database system. CCH is a sophisticated system interfaced with the Integrated Automated Fingerprint Identification System, a database that stores the fingerprints in a

digital format. An estimated 3.5 million records are stored in what is the fifth-largest CHRI database in the country.

CHRI is critical data used at every stage of the criminal justice system to assist arresting agencies, prosecutors, the judiciary, and correctional officials making charging, bail, pretrial release, sentencing, and custo-

Table 2  
CCH records complete according to BJA criterion, by region

Records complete	Chicago	Cook	Collar	Urban	Rural	Other	Total
Yes	387	243	80	404	204	16	1,334
	61%	71%	79%	75%	76%	80%	70%
No	243	98	21	135	64	4	565
	39%	29%	21%	25%	24%	20%	30%
Total	630	341	101	539	268	20	1,899
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 3  
CCH records complete according to the Illinois Statute criterion, by region\*

Records complete	Chicago	Cook	Collar	Urban	Rural	Other	Total
Yes	385	242	75	272	133	10	1,117
	61%	71%	74%	51%	50%	50%	59%
No	245	99	26	267	135	10	728
	39%	29%	26%	49%	50%	50%	38%
Total	630	341	101	539	268	20	1,899
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

\*BJA standards require that 95 percent of current felony arrest records contain disposition information if a disposition has been reached. Illinois law requires that state's attorneys must report *all* decisions (charges filed, added, and modified), not just declinations.

dial decisions. In addition to traditional criminal justice usage of records, Illinois allows public access to conviction information which may be used for background checks for employment, licensing, and purchasing firearms in accordance with the Uniform Conviction Information Act (UCIA) [20 ILCS 2635].

CHRI audits provide a point of reference to assess future improvements to the Illinois criminal history record program. The 2003 audit examined the technological progress and quality of CHRI reporting and served as a follow-up to the 1993-1994 statewide audit.

#### Methodology

To measure the quality of CHRI records, auditors assessed the accuracy, completeness, and timeliness of

CHRI submissions by using the same reverse audit methodology used in the 1995 audit. Auditors collected a statewide representative sample of 2,072 arrests from 50 randomly selected criminal justice agencies for the reporting period of 1994-1998. The final audit sample included 1,640 cases (79 percent) from police agencies, 412 cases (20 percent) from county sheriff's offices, and 20 cases (1 percent) from Illinois State Police units.

#### Completeness

The completeness of records is defined as having all expected state's attorney, court, and custodial dispositions associated with the arrest appear on the rap sheet. Overall 59 percent of the CCH records audited had complete CHRI information. Arrest events had a

high percentage (92 percent) posted to CCH, but the percentages decreased for state's attorney's dispositions (74 percent). *Warrant arrests* and state's attorney's *direct filing* decisions were major factors associated with incomplete criminal history records.

*Warrant arrest*

Audit findings indicated warrant arrests accounted for 40 percent of all arrests not found on CCH. Auditors noted a lack of clear direction among local agencies as to the appropriate method of reporting warrant arrests when multiple arresting agencies are involved. When an arrest warrant is served by an agency other than the issuing agency, the state's attorney and court disposition forms used to submit information to the state police must be forwarded to the appropriate jurisdiction responsible for reporting the event. If the state's attorney and court disposition forms are not forwarded, the submission may remain in a pending status, preventing the CHRI user from examining it in its entirety.

*Direct filing*

The state's attorney is required to report disposition information indicating if the charges were filed, not filed, and/or if any charge information was added, dismissed, or modified subsequent to the filing of a case. Direct filing is an intentional and systematic exclusion of the state's attorney's office (with prior written approval from the state's attorney's office) in the CHRI form routing process that occurs when arresting agencies file charges directly with the circuit court clerks. In accordance with the Criminal Identification Act (20 ILCS 2630), ISP posts dispositions to CCH based on direct filings.

One of the 2003 audit findings indicated 43 percent of the CCH records with "direct file" state's attorney decisions did not have corresponding court dispositions posted. Also, utilizing direct file, any charge modifications, such as a state's attorney's decision not to file, will not be reflected on the record, resulting in

the case remaining in an open status when, in reality, no prosecution of a particular charge was initiated. The audit found state's attorney's dispositions indicating any charge modifications were only on cases from counties where the "direct file" option is not used.

ISP can increase the percentage of complete criminal history records further by monitoring the submissions of warrant arrests and direct file cases. Education of local agencies as to the policies and procedures for CCH database submission of warrant arrest cases will reduce the number of incomplete events. Counties practicing the direct filing of arrest charges may benefit from periodic training on their responsibility to report any charge modifications that may occur before final court disposition.

**Nearly three-quarters of all mailed arrest submissions were posted to CCH within 90 days, an improvement over the level of compliance observed in the 1995 audit. Custodial submissions achieved the highest timely posting rate of 87 percent.**

*Accuracy*

CHRI accuracy was determined by comparing information reported by agencies in the arrest data fields (on a 5-part card) to the information posted by ISP on the CCH. Two arrest data fields had high rates of incomplete information: *class of offense field* (33 percent) and *offense citation field* (13 percent).

*Class of offense*

The statutory class of an arrest charge is a data element indicating the severity of the offense. Without the statutory class, the CHRI user may not be able to determine whether the charge is classified as a felony or misdemeanor. During the audit period, 1994-1998, the *class of offense fields* were examined for felony cases (Class M, X, 1, 2, 3, and 4) and Class A and B misdemeanor offenses reportable to ISP.

Closer examination revealed that 152 out of 160 discrepant arrest cases had a valid class of offense reported by the local agency and recorded on the 5-part card. However, during CCH processing by ISP, the offense class was changed to a "Z", meaning unknown. It appeared that automated charge tables used in CCH processing were substituting generic offense class values for the ones actually recorded in the 5-part

Table 4  
Timeliness of mailed arrest records reporting to Illinois State Police

	2003 Audit cases	2003 Audit percentages	1995 Audit percentages
Within 4 days	541	24%	26%
5-10 days	924	41%	39%
11-20 days	443	19%	16%
21-30 days	97	4%	9%
31 days or more	276	12%	8%
Total	2,281	100%	98%*

\*Percentages do not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

cards. The “Z” designation makes it difficult for a CHRI user to determine if the offense is a felony or misdemeanor, especially when viewing offenses such as theft and drug charge statutes that have numerous possible offense classes.

*Offense citations*

A majority (87 percent) of the cases audited matched entries posted on CCH. In the other 13 percent of cases, the data conflicted between the reporting agency and the CCH entry. Factors causing the error rate included criminal justice agencies incorrectly reporting the citation, and ISP data processing edits. It is critical for agencies to not only correctly identify the appropriate citation but also accurately indicate the full citation on the reporting form. Failure to separate citation subsections using parentheses or dashes can result in incorrect posting of the intended arrest charge.

*Timeliness*

The auditors also examined criminal justice agencies’ reporting compliance with statutory reporting timeframes of the 5-part arrest fingerprint card submissions. CHRI fingerprint-based submissions (arrest and custodial intake events) are required to be reported daily to ISP. State’s attorney, court, and custodial status changes are required to be reported within 30 days of the event date. Audit staff recorded mailed submissions that arrived at the ISP during two three-day cycles and then followed-up on these reporting

events 60 and 90 days later to determine whether they had been posted to the CCH system.

The timeliness audit consisted of 2,381 arrest events, 1,327 state’s attorney dispositions, 896 court dispositions, and 140 custodial dispositions. Nearly three-quarters of all mailed arrest submissions were posted to CCH within 90 days, an improvement over the level of compliance observed in the 1995 audit (Table 4). Custodial submissions achieved the highest timely posting rate of 87 percent, followed by state’s attorney submission (41 percent) and court disposition events (10 percent).

Timeliness of CHRI reporting and posting may be increased through the continued use of electronic submissions by local agencies. ISP can facilitate this by refocusing field training initiatives to include a quality check procedure, such as a performance audit, on local agency submissions. These activities should reflect technological advances, including electronically integrated reporting, and should enhance efforts toward uniform reporting across disparate local agency reporting policies and procedures.

*Conviction status indicator*

The *conviction status indicator* is a data element indicating the most serious conviction noted on an individual’s rapsheet. Only “Felony Conviction,” “Misdemeanor Conviction,” “No Conviction,” or “Pending/Unknown” status options will appear on the rapsheet.

This information reflects the cumulative conviction status of Illinois cases, as well as all cases for that individual reported from 41 participating states in the Interstate Identification Index. Maintained by the FBI, the Interstate Identification Index is an electronic information system that flags other state repositories maintaining criminal history information on individuals arrested for felonies or serious misdemeanors.

The audit task was to verify that the CCH records contained a conviction status value, and to determine whether the conviction status values accurately reflected subsequent events added to the record. The conviction status value was examined on 1,899 cases. During the initial analysis, “Felony Conviction” indicators were labeled on 1,295 cases (68 percent), “Misdemeanor Conviction” indicators were labeled on 178 cases (9 percent), “No Conviction” indicators were labeled on 22 cases, (2 percent), and “Pending and Unknown” indicators were labeled on 404 cases (21 percent).

In the final analysis, records indicating a “Misdemeanor Conviction” status or “Pending/Unknown” status in the initial sample were re-examined a year later to note any changes in the conviction status indicator. When re-examined, 154 of the 178 records assigned a “Misdemeanor Conviction” status, remained the same, however, 23 of these cases (10 percent) were changed to a “Pending or Unknown” status. From the 404 records assigned a “Pending or Unknown” status, 77 percent remained unchanged. A “Pending or

Unknown” status can result from missing class offense information, CHRI events not being reported to ISP, or CCH programming problems.

ISP can further clarify the conviction status indicator for CHRI users by using an indicator to reflect whether the status is based on an Illinois or an out-of-state conviction. This will alleviate confusion that may arise when the conviction status indicator does not match the convictions listed on the Illinois rapsheet.

### *Conclusion*

Because of its direct impact on the daily operations of the criminal justice system, CHRI should reflect complete, accurate, and timely reporting of criminal justice events. Illinois has been implementing CHRI improvement initiatives that include regular audits by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. The audits aim to identify reporting problems and make recommendations for continuous improvement of the integrity of CHRI records. Based in part on audit recommendations, ISP has made substantial modifications and technological improvements across many aspects of the CHRI system. However, the need remains for greater communication and collaboration between ISP and the reporting agencies, which will improve the quality and timeliness in future CHRI reporting.



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