



# Research Bulletin

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## State criminal justice survey seeks methods to stem drug use, violence

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**M**ore youth prevention programs, drug treatment, and offender monitoring potentially will reduce drug use and violence in Illinois, according to a 2005 statewide needs assessment survey sent 1,561 law enforcement professionals.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority contracted with Orbis Partners Inc., a research and consulting agency, to complete the needs assessment survey, replicating a similar one conducted by the Authority in 1996. Responses from hundreds of criminal justice professionals identified four major societal problems said to be getting worse: identity theft, drug and alcohol use, drug dealing, and juvenile crime.

This *Research Bulletin* examines the responses received from eight different professional groups including police chiefs, court clerks, public defenders, state's attorneys, judges, probation officers, juvenile detention center administrators, and victim service providers.

### Survey distribution and response rate

Different survey instruments with between 19 and 34 questions were designed for each profession. *Figure 1* depicts the response rates by profession. Juvenile detention center administrators posted the highest response rate (65 percent), and judges the lowest (25 percent). Police officers returned the most surveys (n=330). Of 1,561 questionnaires sent, 602 were returned, for a response rate of 39 percent.

### Survey overview

In addition to overall agency characteristics, such as their operating budgets and personnel, respondents were asked to identify major contributors to their workload, what problems they saw as getting worse, and what alternatives they felt would reduce drug use and violence. The top three responses for each profession are listed by percentage in *Figure 2*.

### Police chiefs

Responding police departments reported budgets of between \$6,000 and \$120 million, serving communities of between 249 to 3 million people, and averaging 32 full-time officers.

Police departments listed theft and property theft, domestic violence, and juvenile cases as major contributors to their workloads. They selected identity theft, drug and alcohol use and drug dealing, and juvenile

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Figure 1  
Needs assessment survey response rates

Profession	Surveys sent	Number received	Response rate
Police chiefs	940	330	35%
Court clerks	102	51	50%
Public defender	150	42	28%
State's attorneys	103	47	45%
Judges	20	5	25%
Probation officers	117	61	52%
Juvenile detention center administrators	17	11	65%
Victim service providers	112	57	51%

crime as types of crimes that are getting worse. They advocated offender monitoring, more arrests and prosecutions, youth prevention programs, and more severe punishments as steps to reduce drug use and violence.

**Court clerks**

Court clerks reported an average operating budget of \$880,000, with budgets ranging between \$50,000 and \$8 million. Twenty-two percent said they had specialized courts, including drug court, mental health court, arbitration, and domestic violence court.

Major workload contributors for clerks were traffic cases or criminal cases, and small claims or civil cases. Clerks selected illicit drug dealing, drug and alcohol use, and juvenile crime as worsening problems. Most court clerks felt more severe punishments and more arrests or prosecutions would reduce violence.

**Public defenders**

With an average annual operating budget of \$880,000, public defenders handled an average case load per attorney of 374 cases in state fiscal year 2004 (FY04). Almost all attorneys handled non-capital homicide, domestic violence, juvenile, and misdemeanor cases, and sex offender assignments. Many also acted as guardian *ad litem* (meaning for the suit or action), mental health consultants, child advocates, and in capital trials.

Major types of cases contributing to their workloads were drug possession, drug sale, domestic violence, and juvenile cases. Case processing activities that

added to their work included plea bargaining, police issuing too many charges, and mandatory sentencing. Public defenders indicated that their high case loads resulted in increased attorney use of plea bargaining.

Regarding diversions or sentencing alternatives, 57 percent called for major improvements in mental health treatment, and 53 percent advocated improvements in each of three areas: community services, drug treatment, and sex offender treatment.

In the area of pretrial practices, 59 percent of public defenders called for improving the timeliness of DNA processing, 54 percent improving the timeliness in drug processing, and 56 percent improving other crime lab processing. Also, 54 percent recommended police receive training relating to obtaining confessions.

Public defenders supported more educational and employment opportunities, youth prevention programs, drug treatment, and offender monitoring as ways to reduce drug use and violence.

**State's attorneys**

With average annual operating budgets of \$756,000, state's attorneys handled an average caseload of 1,047 in FY04. Driving while intoxicated, domestic violence, and drug possession cases dominated state's attorney's workloads. Case processing activities contributing to their workloads included the number of cases, plea bargains, and jury trials they handled. State's attorneys also reported that the high workloads caused increases in plea bargaining.

Regarding pre-trial practices, 53 percent of state's attorneys cited DNA processing and 43 percent cited drug processing as areas in need of improvement. Over half felt electronic filing also needed major improvement.

Many state's attorney offices operate specialized units, with 27 percent reporting juvenile crimes units and 26 percent domestic violence units. Most state's attorney offices also had victim/witness assistance staff. Fifty-three percent of state's attorneys called for mental health treatment and 48 percent for drug treatment as diversionary or sentencing alternatives.

**Judges**

The five judges responding to the survey rated domestic violence, juvenile crime, and violence against

Figure 2  
Law enforcement professionals survey response analysis\*

Respondents	Major contributors to workload	Drug reduction recommendation	Violence reduction recommendation	Worsening problems
<b>Police chiefs</b>	Property theft–61% Domestic violence–54% Juvenile crime–52%	Monitoring offenders–84% More arrests/prosecution–82% Youth prevention programs–81%	More arrests/prosecution–82% More severe punishments–81% Increased offender monitoring–80%	Identity theft–78% Drug/alcohol use–58% Drug dealing–51%
<b>County clerks</b>	Criminal cases–98% Traffic cases–98% Small claims–69%	More severe punishments–85% More arrests/prosecution–82% Offender monitoring–76%	More severe punishments–87% More arrests/prosecution–81% Better employment opportunities–81%	Drug dealing–70% Drug/alcohol use–68% Juvenile crime–63%
<b>Public defenders</b>	Drug possession–95% Drug sales–88% Domestic violence–83%	Better educational opportunities–98% Better employment opportunities–95% Youth prevention programs–93%	Better educational opportunities–90% Better employment opportunities–85% Drug treatment–78%	Identity theft–57% Drug/alcohol use–47% Juvenile crime–46%
<b>State’s attorneys</b>	Driving while intoxicated–96% Domestic violence–91% Drug possession–87%	Youth prevention programs–88% Offender monitoring–88% Drug treatment–86%	Youth prevention programs–83% Drug treatment–80% Better employment opportunities–76%	Identity theft–67% Drug/alcohol use–64% Drug dealing–57%
<b>Probation officers</b>	Day reporting–56% Sex offender supervision–48% Intensive supervision–30%	Drug treatment–86% Youth prevention programs–83% Better employment opportunities–79%	Youth prevention programs–85% Drug treatment–82% Better employment opportunities–76%	Identity theft–73% Drug/alcohol use–68% Drug dealing–66%
<b>Juvenile detention center administrators</b>	Not asked	Increased offender monitoring–91% Better job opportunities–91% Drug treatment–82% Youth prevention programs–82% Better educational opportunities–82%	Better educational opportunities–100% Increased offender monitoring–80% Better employment opportunities–80%	Domestic violence–64% School violence–46% Drug/alcohol use–36% Illegal use of firearms–36%
<b>Victim service providers</b>	Information and referrals–89% Criminal justice advocacy–85% Case management–83%	Drug treatment–96% Youth prevention programs–94% Better educational opportunities–76%	Youth prevention programs–94% Increased offender monitoring–89% More arrests/prosecution–87%	Identity theft–81% Juvenile crime–73% Drug/alcohol use–69%

\*Judges excluded due to small sample size.

women as areas that showed improvement, but they stressed the need for major staff increases in public defenders, translators and interpreters.

As diversionary or sentencing alternatives needing development they identified day reporting centers, balanced and restorative justice, and short-term com-

munity incarceration. Fine collection procedures and evidence-based probation services were listed as court management procedures needing development.

**Probation officers**

Operating budgets for probation departments averaged \$2.6 million. For the year, the average number of pro-

bationers under supervision per department was 1,276, while the average number of probation officers was 26, and the average number of pre-trial cases under supervision was 165.

Officers indicated responsibilities contributing to their workload included offender supervision, intake, presentence investigations, urine collection, and community services. To reduce drug use and violence, officers recommended more drug treatment and youth prevention programs, and officers cited identity theft, drug/alcohol use and drug dealing as worsening problems.

### Juvenile detention center administrators

Detention centers, with an average annual budget of \$2.4 million, handled an average daily population of 34.5 juveniles, accepted an annual average of 565 admissions, and were staffed by an average 42 full-time employees.

Administrators (64 percent) expressed concerns with mental health issues of juveniles in detention, and recommended day reporting centers be considered as a detention alternative. Administrators also indicated the need for training in language translation (55 percent), program evaluations (46 percent), and working with special needs prisoners (40 percent). Meeting rooms are needed for lawyers and families, they said, and 55 percent said sex offender treatment and pre-release services, such as halfway houses, needed development.

Juvenile detention center administrators were also asked about types of offenses committed by their clients. Fifty-five percent of administrators stated juveniles in the detention center population had committed violent crimes, and 36 percent of administrators cited both property offenses and perceived probation violations as other types of crimes committed by detention center juveniles.

### Victim service providers

Victim service providers from the Illinois Coalition on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse, Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence, and Child Advocacy Centers responded to the survey. Providers indicated child sex abuse, sexual assaults, and domestic violence cases were major contributors to their workload. Services

impacting that workload included information and referrals, criminal justice advocacy, case management, and personal advocacy.

The providers recommended drug treatment and youth prevention programs to reduce violence, and listed identity theft and drug/alcohol use as problems that were getting worse.

Providers felt that some courtroom procedures were in need of major improvement, including case continuance policies, victim involvement in decision-making, reviews of charging decisions, and enforcement of victim rights.

### Project challenges

Researchers felt the survey response rate was lower than expected due to the length of the survey, the time it took to complete the survey, and concerns respondents had about the survey's confidentiality. Also, some respondent contact information was incorrect or outdated, causing blank surveys to be returned.

### Conclusion

Insights into the criminal justice system as provided by the needs assessment survey potentially can be used to inform and aid in planning and policy decisions.

Based on survey responses, researchers concluded:

- Though workloads among criminal justice practitioners differ, police, prosecutors, and public defenders are handling a large number of domestic violence and juvenile cases.
- Prosecutors and public defenders both indicated their high workloads increase plea bargaining.
- Identity theft, drug/alcohol use, drug dealing and juvenile crime are getting worse.
- Youth prevention programs, drug treatment and offender monitoring should be employed to reduce drug use and violence.
- Prosecutors and public defenders agree on the need for more mental health and drug treatment services to reduce drug use and violence, and on the need for major improvements in DNA and drug processing.