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*On Good Authority* is a periodic briefing on trends and issues in criminal justice. This report was written by staff Research Analyst Karen Levy McCanna. It is a summary of a program evaluation of the Cash Transaction Reporting Units and the Drug Conspiracy Task Forces operated by the Illinois State Police and Illinois Attorney General's Office. The evaluation was conducted by the University of Illinois at Springfield. Copies of the evaluation are available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority is a state agency dedicated to improving the administration of criminal justice in Illinois. The basic functions of the Authority are criminal justice research, federal and state grants administration, and information systems development and support.

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## Program evaluation

# Targeting drug activity through cash transactions

Law enforcement agencies have begun to employ more collaborative and creative approaches to targeting illegal drug activity. Realizing that illicit drug activity can be detected by the large amount of cash it generates, authorities have put increased resources into identifying money-laundering activities and targeting the assets of individuals involved in drug sales.

In 1992 and early 1993, funding from the Anti-Drug Abuse Act through the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority enabled the Illinois Attorney General's Office and the Illinois State Police (ISP) to undertake four interrelated initiatives to address illegal drug sales. These initiatives consisted of a Cash Transaction Reporting Unit (CTRU) and a Drug Conspiracy Task Force (DCTF) in each agency.

The CTRUs were designed to collect, store, and analyze cash transaction data for subsequent identification, investigation, and prosecution of individuals involved in drug-related money laundering. The CTRU operated by ISP was designed to assist in multijurisdictional investigations and included a database for the identification of suspected offenders. The reporting unit operated by the Attorney General's Office provided prosecutorial expertise to support the investigation and prosecution of drug traffickers.

The two units were designed to complement one another and also assist the DCTFs operated by both agencies.

The task forces were organized to enhance the investigation of mid-level drug-trafficking conspiracies operating across jurisdictional boundaries. Similar to the CTRU, the ISP Drug Conspiracy Task Force handled the investigations of traffickers, while the task force maintained by the Attorney General's Office provided prosecutorial support. Originally, the units from both agencies were based in the Chicago area, but the ISP task force has since moved to Springfield.

In 1996, the Authority funded an evaluation of the programs, conducted by the University of Illinois at Springfield. Researchers utilized case file information, activity reports, funding agreement documentation, correspondence, and interviews to establish assessment data and make program recommendations. Issues relating to personnel, resource allocation, and location were the main focus of the evaluation findings.

## Evaluation findings

Between August 1992 and February 1996, the ISP Cash Transaction Reporting Unit identified and referred to the appropriate investigative unit 13 money-laundering targets. The unit also provided financial information and analysis to local agencies with the expectation that these agencies would later provide targets to the unit. Table 1 shows the number of calls requesting information from the ISP unit. The regions were identified by grouping area codes from available telephone records. For example, the Chicago region



**Table 1**  
Requests for information made to the Illinois State Police  
Cash Transaction Reporting Unit by region

| Region                          | Percentage of calls | Number of calls |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Chicago                         | 15%                 | 244             |
| Collar counties                 | 37%                 | 603             |
| North (Rockford/Joliet)         | 12.1%               | 196             |
| Northwest (Rock Island/Peoria)  | 7.1%                | 114             |
| Central (Springfield/Champaign) | 20.4%               | 332             |
| South (E. St. Louis/Carbondale) | 8.4%                | 137             |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>100%</b>         | <b>1,626*</b>   |

\* N = 1,626 total number of calls, 86 calls were from unknown counties and are not included in the table.

includes areas with the area codes 312 and 773.

The attorney general's Cash Transaction Reporting Unit evaluated 48 situations of possible law violations, although some of these targets were outside of its scope of operations. In 1992 and 1993, the unit assisted other units of the Attorney General's Office by

investigating Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) and Medicare cases.

The ISP's Drug Conspiracy Task Force seized more than 87,000 grams of cocaine and more than \$1 million in cash between February 1993 and June 1997. Table 2 delineates the amounts of seized materials using unequal time frames to accommodate the initiation of narcotics reporting. The task force handled 158

case investigations involving 180 crimes from January 1993 through June 1997. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of referrals to the task force from Illinois agencies.

From February 1993 through December 1997, the attorney general's Drug Conspiracy Task Force handled 77 cases that resulted in 41 indictments of one or more defendants. During the first half of 1997, the number of indictments

**Table 2**  
Seizures by the Illinois State Police Drug Conspiracy Task Force

| Time Period              | U.S. Currency      | Vehicles  | Cocaine (grams) | Marijuana (pounds) | Heroin (kilograms) |
|--------------------------|--------------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Feb. 1993-<br>Oct. 1994  | \$501              | 1         | Not reported    | Not reported       | Not reported       |
| June 1994-<br>Feb. 1996  | \$118,736          | 0         | 341             | 6,379              | 6.4                |
| March 1996-<br>June 1997 | \$1,077,558*       | 14**      | 86,758          | 5,890              | 0.1                |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>\$1,196,795</b> | <b>15</b> | <b>87,099</b>   | <b>12,269</b>      | <b>6.5</b>         |

\* During this time period seizures were categorized as either DCTF seizures or seizures occurring while assisting other agencies. Of these currency seizures, \$1,058,327 was seized by the DCTF and \$19,231 was seized while assisting other agencies.

\*\* Of these vehicle seizures, five were made solely by the DCTF and nine occurred during assists.



increased while the number of defendants decreased due to the focus of prosecution on higher-ranking members of drug-trafficking organizations.

### Strengths

The evaluation findings elaborate on both positive and negative aspects of program operations. The strengths indicated for the agencies involved are centered on the effort to provide services for requesting agencies.

#### ■ Conceptual design

Individuals interviewed in the course of the evaluation indicated that a mid-level drug conspiracy enforcement effort is needed. Units with statewide jurisdiction can provide avenues to investigate and prosecute drug trafficking cases beyond the street level.

#### ■ Evidence of positive change

Staff made strides in keeping their units viable when mandated goals were not attainable. For example, the state police's Cash Transaction Reporting Unit acted as an information resource to requesting agencies after its initial effort to offer identified targets to Illinois agencies was

not utilized. The unit was so successful in this area that the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) cited the unit as a model. FinCEN is a Department of Treasury program addressing domestic and international money-laundering operations.

#### ■ Downstate initiative

Although the resources offered by the ISP CTRU and DCTF in the metropolitan areas were viewed as somewhat redundant by local agencies, the central and southern portions of the state can greatly benefit from the investigations and prosecutorial assistance.

### Weaknesses

The weaknesses noted in the evaluation focused on personnel issues and lack of goal-oriented activities.

#### ■ Ambiguity of mission

The two-pronged mission of the units raised some issues. While the units were to serve as a resource to other agencies, they also were responsible for initiating cases. This produced both proactive and reactive goals. The units, with the possible exception of the Illinois State

Police's Drug Conspiracy Task Force, moved in the direction of support and assistance rather than initiation of cases.

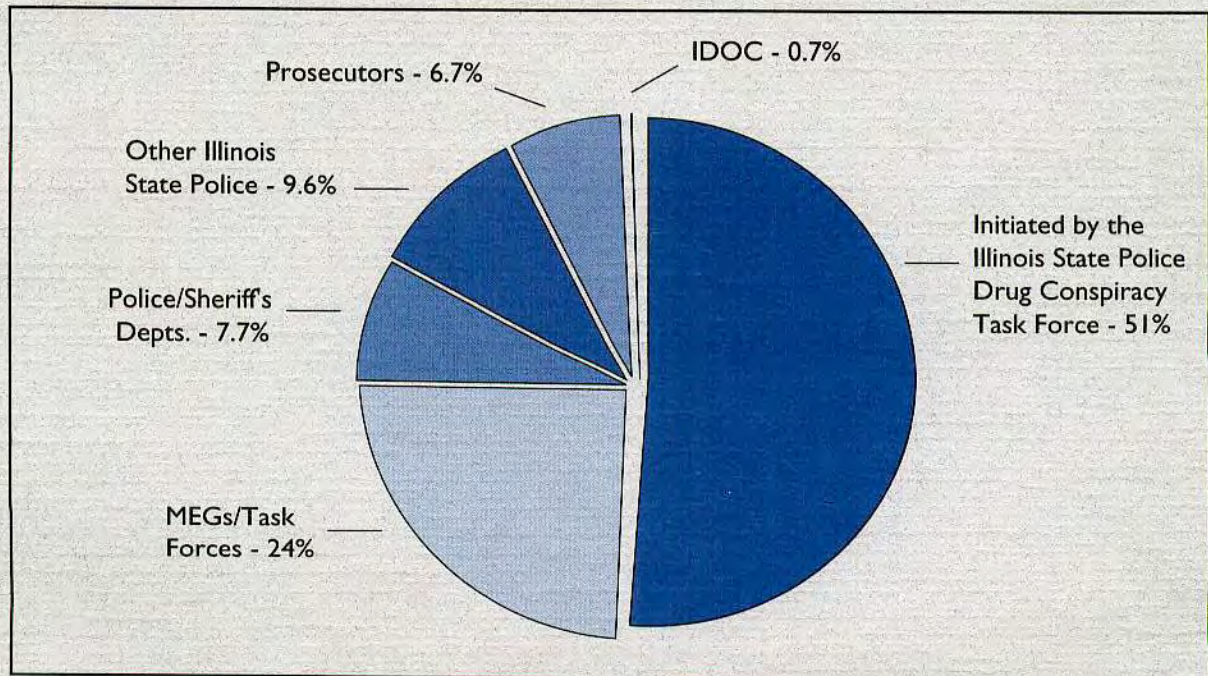
#### ■ Overlapping jurisdictions

Both horizontal and vertical jurisdictional problems were indicated. Horizontally, conflicts regarding investigative functions were evident between the ISP and the Attorney General's Office. Vertically, the task force efforts were sometimes viewed as encroachment by local agencies and, particularly in large jurisdictions where extensive special drug operations were already in place, as unnecessary.

#### ■ Data reliability and accessibility

Self-reported data were occasionally contradictory to case file data viewed by the evaluators. Additionally, reporting instruments were altered during the evaluation period causing changes in the data elements being collected by unit staff. The changes reflect changes in operational activity as they occurred during the evaluation period. This resulted in program staff making decisions based on inconsistent data.

Figure 1  
Origin of cases referred to the Illinois State Police Drug Conspiracy Task Force





## Resource issues

Under the CTRU/DCTF framework, the separate operations of four units operated by two different agencies led to a lack of communication and information exchange between the units. The result was a duplication of efforts both within and outside the CTRU/DCTF framework.

## Recommendations

- At the end of its four-year funding, the Cash Transaction Reporting Unit of the Attorney General's Office was disbanded and its assets absorbed by other entities within the governing body's offices. The remaining three units should maintain a clear focus on higher-level drug conspiracies, particularly with regard to case identification and development.

Three events have taken place to facilitate the implementation of this recommendation. First, regional resource centers have assumed the responsibilities for field requests for data from the cash transaction reporting database. Second,

referrals are being utilized as the starting point for conspiracy investigation development. Third, resources offered by both task forces are more readily available to agencies in the central and southern portions of the state.

- The units should reassess their operations on communication, roles, and internal/external relationships as defined in the full evaluation report. The ISP and Attorney General's Office should combine efforts to address these issues. The elimination of the attorney general's reporting unit, and the redefining of the state police unit's function may act as a catalyst for the implementation of this recommendation.

- Information management needs to be examined in terms of data reliability and accessibility.

Evaluators indicate that a starting point for implementation of this recommendation lies in the identification of the unit's information needs. Specifically, a comparison of information needs would

facilitate discussion of issues surrounding data collection/retention, quality and accessibility to promote information exchange within and between agencies.

- The Attorney General's Office and Illinois State Police should explore mechanisms to enhance the integration of the operations of the Cash Transaction Reporting Unit and Drug Conspiracy Task Force.

The goal of operating well-integrated units to maximize resources requires support from the highest levels of the agencies involved. A central administrative structure is suggested to provide a structured format of information exchange and case referral processes.

(The full report, *An Evaluation of Illinois' Cash Transaction Reporting Unit and Drug Conspiracy Task Force*, is available from the Authority's Research and Analysis Unit.) ■

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