

## A STATE PROGRAM FOR CENTRALIZED CRIMINAL STATISTICS

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During the decade of the 1920's, considerable attention was given to the development of more adequate information on crime and the administration of criminal justice. Several well-known surveys were conducted showing in detail exactly what happened to arrested persons who were charged with a crime. These studies revealed that factual knowledge of the way in which justice was normally administered was often unknown. The proportion of arrested persons who were ultimately convicted of the offenses on which they were charged was very small, much less than had been assumed.

These studies included the Cleveland Survey, directed by Roscoe Pound and Felix Frankfurter, published in 1922; the Missouri Survey, directed by Arthur Lashley, the published report in 1926 being edited by Raymond Moley; the Illinois Survey, directed by Lashley with Moley as consultant published in 1929; and the New York Crime Commission reports of 1927. In all of these, Professor C. D. Gehlke of Western Reserve University was a primary statistical consultant. Another survey of the same type, made in Oregon by Wayne Morse and Ronald Beattie, was published in 1931.

Each of these studies followed a similar pattern. A schedule was established for each person arrested and each step of the administrative processes that occurred following arrest was recorded up to final termination of the case. This provided a summary record of what happened to persons arrested in a given area in terms of each step of the process and made possible the construction of mortality tables.

The famed National Commission on Law Observation and Enforcement, established by President Hoover, conducted a series of studies which were published during 1931-32. This body, commonly known as the Wickersham Commission, published Report No. 3 on Criminal Statistics on April 1, 1931 and Report No. 4 on Prosecution on April 22, 1931.

The Prosecution Report, authored by Alfred Bettman of Cincinnati, contains a rather complete review and analysis of the crime surveys already mentioned, and in less detail of several others made during the same period. The statistics report considered specifically the problems and needs of criminal statistics. No better description can be offered of current problems than to quote from Page 4 of this report.

*"For our purposes in a large view, the statistics which ought to be gathered, compiled, and published authoritatively at regular intervals, fall under three main heads--crime and criminals, prosecution, and penal treatment. We need to know the volume and character of the offenses committed, both in the past and at any specified time in the present, both in the local-*

*ity in which for the moment we are interested and in other localities, whether like or unlike in their conditions. We need to know what persons or types of persons, if types may be differentiated, commit these offenses. We need to know what happens to them, whether they are arrested, whether they are prosecuted, and, if so, with what result. We need to know how the machinery of investigation and detection operates, how the prosecuting machinery operates, how the machinery of trying and judging operates in each of its parts. We need to know what happens to the convicted offender, what takes place in the course of penal treatment, how the agencies of penal treatment operate, and what happens to the criminal not merely in the course of penal treatment but afterwards."*

The report further outlined certain basic principles for development of an adequate criminal statistics system.

1. *Criminal statistics should be gathered, compiled and published in each jurisdiction.*
2. *The publishing and compiling of criminal statistics should not be confined to any bureaus or agencies engaged in administering criminal law.*
3. *Local officials ought not to be expected to do more than to turn in to the appropriate central office exactly what their records disclosed.*

The Commission quoted with approval the following statement of Sam B. Warner who prepared the basic summary of criminal statistics presented in this report.

*"The value of criminal statistics in society's struggle with crime may be compared with that of the balance sheet and profit-and-loss statement in a corporation's struggles for profits. Neither the balance sheet nor the profit-and-loss statement show why the business has been successful, yet no corporation would think of operating without them. The balance sheet and the profit-and-loss statement are for the corporation the indispensable tools of knowledge. Similarly, criminal statistics are the indispensable tools of knowledge for any community that is attempting to reduce its crime and improve its administration of criminal justice."*

With the emphasis and publicity given to the early surveys and the summarizing and restatement of objectives expressed in the 1931 Wickersham report, it is somewhat disconcerting to realize that today, nearly 35 years later, there has been very little progress made toward establishing centralized criminal statistics of the type outlined.

The fact that every state is sovereign in its criminal administration and its laws and procedures makes it essential that each state assume the primary responsibility for the collection of criminal statistics within its jurisdiction. If we are to have a national picture of crime it can only be accomplished by having individual states do their part by compiling full data in accordance with acceptable uniform definitions and procedures. A central agency would then develop a nationwide picture from the data supplied by each state. No such national information exists today. The Uniform Crime Reports issued by the Federal Bureau of Investigation are almost entirely based on summary information supplied directly by some 8,000 or more local law enforcement agencies and are limited to the number of certain types of offenses reported to the police and an annual summary of persons arrested. These data lack comparability between states and, of course, do not adequately portray the facts as to the administration of criminal justice nor do they touch the correctional area. There is a National Prisoner Statistics' collection published by the Federal Bureau of Prisons, which prior to 1948, had been the responsibility of the Census Bureau. This collection originally accounted for prisoners committed to and released from federal and state penal institutions but in recent years has become much more limited in the information made available than when it was conducted by the Census Bureau.

One of the recommendations of the Wickersham Commission (Page 17) called for a uniform state law to be drafted and enacted centralizing responsibility for collecting desired data on crime and the administration of criminal justice. In 1946, such a law, drafted by Professor Thorsten Sellin, was adopted and promulgated by the National Commissioners on Uniform State Laws. To date, California is the only state that has actually adopted it (in 1955) and created a central bureau for gathering criminal data.

The California development commenced in 1945 when, by executive order, a Bureau of Criminal Statistics was established in the Department of Justice to serve at that time the needs of the Departments of Corrections and Youth Authority as well as provide statewide statistics. In 1955, the bureau had developed to the point of receiving comprehensive reports on crime from all local jurisdictions in the state and at that time the Legislature adopted the Uniform Criminal Statistics Act which in effect gave statutory sanction to the agency already in existence.

The California Bureau of Criminal Statistics today receives criminal data throughout the state as follows:

1. *A monthly summary report from all law enforcement agencies (about 500) of felony offenses known to the police.*
2. *A monthly summary report from all law enforcement agencies accounting for adult felony arrests by offense and police disposition, and a summary count, by offense, of*

*adult misdemeanor arrests.*

3. *A monthly summary report from all law enforcement agencies of arrested persons under the age of 18 years, by offense and disposition.*
4. *An individual report on each person released from a jail sentence from five county jails of the state.*
5. *An individual report on each person prosecuted in California superior courts, accounting by date for type of pleas, trials, and sentences.*
6. *An individual report on each adult referred to probation by the superior courts for 56 counties of the state, and for the other two counties, summary information.*
7. *Reports on the current status of each adult placed on probation until final determination.*
8. *An individual report on each adult referred and placed on probation by the lower courts from 26 counties of the state.*
9. *An individual report on every juvenile referred to juvenile probation departments together with follow-up reports concerning status changes until time of final termination. These data are received on each individual from 56 counties and in summary form from two counties.*
10. *An individual report from 17 counties of the state on each juvenile re-referred to the juvenile court while on probation.*
11. *A report on persons received and released from county juvenile camps, from 11 camps on an individual report form and from 31 on a summary basis.*
12. *Individual reports from 14 counties and summary reports from 44 other counties on persons received into and released from juvenile halls.*
13. *A drug offender file which is kept current on each offender on the basis of information received by the State Identification Bureau including arrest and offense reports involving narcotics, criminal record histories or rap sheets, and disposition reports received relating to these offenders. The file, which was started in 1959, now contains information on some 35,000 individuals arrested on some type of narcotic charge.*

From the above it will be seen that the coverage of information concerning crime and delinquents in California is fairly wide-spread. There are still gaps to be filled in particularly in the area of jail, misdemeanor probation, and re-referral of juveniles. However, the greatest weakness is that all of the reporting at the crime and arrest level is summary and there is no way at the present time to follow individual offenders from the point of arrest through prose-

cution and treatment.

The objectives of the California bureau for the future are to develop complete information on crime and delinquency within the state and to interrelate all of the known data. This will require first, the extension of the coverage to all areas not now reporting, and second and most important, the establishment of an individual accounting system permitting each person arrested to be followed through the entire criminal-justice process, as was done in the surveys of the 1920's, and through correctional treatment and even beyond to subsequent criminal behavior. Until this is done, the need for information as outlined in the National Commission Report of 1931 will never be met.

The development of an integrated accounting for offenders who come into the processes of criminal justice will necessitate more complete information about the offender and a much more satisfactory classification of offenses. There should be established an individual criminal record history that in itself is complete and comprehensive enough to describe the individual, his characteristics, the status of his criminal career at each and every point in which he appears or reappears, and the effectiveness of the correctional programs to which he has been exposed.

One of the weakest areas in present-day criminal statistics, besides the lack of individualized information, is offense data. Crimes are reported in terms of general groupings such as burglary, robbery, theft, etc. There is no present identification of the degree of seriousness of the offense reported. A most valuable contribution, recently published by Professors Sellin and Wolfgang on "The Measurement of Delinquency", points up this problem and offers the results of a very thorough study of juvenile arrests in the city of Philadelphia and the development of an objective weighting scheme for criminal offenses. This pioneer effort clearly demonstrates the tremendous need for subclassifying offense data in more meaningful terms. Until progress is made in this direction, the general statistical data on crimes reported to the police

will continue to be of exceedingly limited value as an acceptable index of crime.

A rapid growth in the number and rate of crimes reported over the past years is revealed in Uniform Crime Reports and in the California data--particularly with regard to property offenses. Many authorities in criminal statistics suspect that more and more of the minor types of criminal property offenses are being recorded than before indicating the tremendous numerical increase may not mean an equivalent rise in serious crime. However, until better classifications can be made of the offenses reported we cannot test even this hypothesis.

In summary, it must be again pointed out that to properly develop criminal statistics in the United States requires each state to assume its primary responsibility for accounting for all of the information on crime, criminal offenders, and the administration of criminal justice under its sovereign jurisdiction. There is a great need for a national picture of crime but the states must produce the basic information on which a national picture can be compiled. It is an unfortunate truth that what we know today about our national crime problem factually is even less than it was 25 years ago and there is little evidence at the moment of any steps being taken to improve this situation.

From the standpoint of the ordinary citizen, crime is a serious problem. It is to be combated by all means of prevention and control and this includes the concentrated and combined effort of all agencies; law enforcement, prosecution, courts, probation, and correctional institutions. The information as to what happens throughout the states must be made available and if it is not centralized it remains segmented, non-uniform, and subject to ready misinterpretation. The development of an effective coordinated attack by all agencies concerned with this problem rests to a large extent on the creation of adequate and factual information. We still lack the tools of knowledge that Sam Bass Warner, 35 years ago, pointed out must be available to reduce crime and improve criminal justice.