



Transcript: Justice Matters – Corrections Information Sharing To Improve Reentry Success: Conference Remarks by John Kenney

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Justice Podcast Series is designed to provide the latest information in justice innovations, practices, and perspectives from the field of criminal justice. The podcast that you are about to hear was recorded at the BJA National Conference, held on December 6–8 in Washington, D.C., and is a segment from the workshop session *Corrections Information Sharing to Improve Reentry Success*.¹ In this edition, John Kenney, Assistant Deputy Superintendent of Special Operations at the Hampden County Sheriff's Office in Ludlow, Massachusetts [www.hcsdmass.org], discusses Hampden County's information sharing and reentry initiatives and how the sharing of accurate, complete, and timely offender information across justice, health, education, and other sectors can improve service delivery and promote the success of offenders returning to their communities.

Chris Traver: Hello, my name is Chris Traver from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and we are here today to talk to you about the Corrections Information Sharing to Improve Reentry Project. Here with me today is John Kenney, who is the Assistant [Deputy] Superintendent of Special Operations for the Hampden County Sheriff's Department in Ludlow, Massachusetts. The facility holds 1,700 pre-trial and sentenced inmates. Mr. Kenney's responsibilities include facility security, intelligence and investigations, and acting as a liaison with fellow criminal justice agencies. He has worked for the sheriff's department for 29 years, beginning his career as a correctional officer and working his way through the ranks to his present position. He specializes in internal investigations and information sharing. For the last 4 years, he has been the architect and administrator of the Western Massachusetts Sheriff's Information System [Network, WMSIN]. This system, for the first time in the history of Massachusetts, has linked the four western Massachusetts sheriff's offices together, and it allows criminal justice agencies to query the sheriffs' databases for information. Mr. Kenney holds a bachelor of science in criminal justice from Elmira College.

Now, Mr. Kenney's going to give us an overview of the information-sharing efforts within Hampden County, to include the sheriff's department's reentry initiative. John.

John Kenney: Good afternoon. A little background from the Hampden County perspective. There's 480,000 residents in Hampden County: a couple of larger cities are the city of Springfield . . . 150,000 residents, and Holyoke has 39,000 residents. Geographically, we are situated 90 miles west of Boston [Massachusetts] and situated on the intersection of the Mass Pike and Interstate 91, so we see our fair share of crime.

As Chris has told you, we have a 1,700-bed facility. We house both pre-trial and sentenced [inmates]. It was built in 1992 and it's a medium-security facility, and we use the direct supervision mode to run the facility. This facility replaced the facility that was built in the Hoover administration, and we have 1,100 inmates behind the fence at the main facility in Ludlow [Massachusetts]. There's 390 correctional officers who work there and there's 72 supervisors. We also have three separate sites distinct from the main facility: that is the Western Massachusetts Regional Women's [Correctional Center] facility in Chicopee, Mass.,—there's 140 inmates that reside there; our pre-release center, which is on the grounds in Ludlow—there's another 200 inmates there; and we also have a very unique situation in downtown Springfield, the Western Massachusetts Correctional Alcohol Center, which houses 200 inmates.

I [would like to] take a couple minutes here to introduce Sheriff Ashe. Sheriff Ashe was elected in 1974. He has ran six successful times without an opponent, most recently reelected in November. And the sheriff is from a fairly unique perspective of a sheriff in that he holds a master's degree in social work from Boston College. And the sheriff's motto is firm but fair, and he wants to give inmates the opportunity to take advantage of the tools that we provide in the facility to change their lives.

Just a little bit of a background on our present information-sharing efforts in the county as you go back to Chris's introduction of me. I'm a security person. I work in security. I work in intelligence. I work in the facility security and liaison with the police departments. My history is that we would have daily, sometimes hourly, phone calls from district attorneys and fellow law enforcement—federal, local, state—looking

¹ This session was designed to highlight the efforts of two of the pilots supported under BJA's Corrections Information Sharing Implementation Program.

for information on inmates that are residing in the facility. Particularly, this came to light during the advent of the gang situation in Western Massachusetts, which was probably the late 70s, early 80s, and all of a sudden it became recognized in the law enforcement community in Western Massachusetts that the jails were reservoirs of information, and that we can help from a public safety perspective.

Fast forward to the events of 9/11/2001 and the advent of the Homeland Security funding that has been developed and distributed throughout the states. We participated in the Western Massachusetts [Western Region] Homeland Security Advisory Council [www.wrhsac.org/Contact/contact.html] and one of the subcommittees there was sharing of information. We then decided to take our information, place it in the secure environment, build a search engine that allows police departments, prosecutors, probation, [and] parole [officers] to search for inmates in our system in a variety of ways based on bits of data that we collect daily during the course of business. And I think that is an important point because we do accumulate all this information—height, eye color, hair color, tattoos, gang affiliation, who visits the inmate, who puts money in the inmate’s canteen account, who the inmate resides with—all of this information is kept normally during the course of business and potentially could be an important aspect of information to outside law enforcement agencies. We have set for the last 7 years . . . administered yearly updates based on additional funding, and we’ve enhanced and offered new features on the sheriff’s information network. Once again, it resides in a secure environment; it’s on our local CJIS [Criminal Justice Information System] network, and only police departments can query it, so it’s really an easy exchange of information because it’s CORI agency [Criminal Offender Record Information, www.masslegalhelp.org/cori] and there is very little privacy situations involved, and the privacy situation will go up as we continue later into my presentation, and I’ll point out how important that is going to be in our efforts to expand our information-sharing system to include service providers from a reentry perspective.

Reentry in Hampden County starts on Day One. We put a lot of effort into reentry from an inmate perspective. We begin with an LSI [Level of Service Inventory] inventory. The LSI inventory indicates criminogenic factors that have brought the inmate into our custody based on whatever charges they are being held on. From the LSI, we spend a lot of time developing what we call the service plan. The service plan addresses those issues, whether it be substance abuse, whether it be violence, whether it be situations from other criminal activity perspectives, [such as] carrying a firearm. We spent a lot of time indicating and dealing with inmates from a firearms perspective.

Sheriff Ashe is committed to public safety. We’re committed to taking our best shot in a good way at the inmate while [he or she is] incarcerated with us. Some of the programs that we put our inmates through [are] 28- and 29-day narcotic drug programs, domestic violence, victims, GED, college courses, kitchen/maintenance industries, anger management, high-risk offenders, and parenting classes. This is just a small example of the efforts that we have in exposing inmates to populations. As I mentioned before, reentry planning starts from Day One.

One of the most unique aspects of the Hampden County Sheriff’s Department is the development in the last 6 or 7 years of what we call the “After Incarceration Support System[s].” [www.hcsdmass.org/aiss.htm] That is a group of individuals hired by the sheriff, and they work out into the communities. So, as an inmate is discharged from the facility, they are allowed on a purely voluntary basis to access this walk-in center, which is located in downtown Springfield, in a particularly high-crime area of Springfield, and it focuses on discharged inmates. Now that referral process begins during the incarceration, and there’s a typical flow of information, whether it be from the case worker, from the correctional officer, from various people that deal with it, from a medical perspective, from a psychological assessment perspective. All of that information once again is kept in our databases on a normal course of business during the day. That service plan, as the inmate is walked through his incarceration, will turn into a release plan and, based on the issues that we have determined the inmate to need help in upon reintegration into the community, that service plan will focus on certain specific service providers in the community that will particularly help this inmate upon discharge.

Presently we have community partnerships with over 300 agencies; substance abuse, housing, mental health, employment, health clinics, spiritual assistance, educational institutions. We also have a very extensive public health program. It is based on a ZIP Code basis and [when] an inmate is discharged, he is referred to a neighborhood health clinic from a ZIP Code perspective. And information obtained during the course of business in the facility is vital to those particular agencies willing to work with the inmate upon release.

What are some of the information that we collect that may be vital to services providers upon receipt of the inmate after incarceration? Well, we have a substance abuse history. We have family support. Have they been having continual family support? Are they getting money into the commissary or canteen account? Do they have regular family visitation, and who are they? Family history: how they grew up, how many parents, what schooling, what educational level. Clinical notes from a mental health perspective, clinical notes [or] treatment notes from a medical perspective, and behavior reports: What has the inmate been doing in the facility?

This is a small example of some of the agencies that have agreed to work with us and [that] we have a flourishing relationship with. CareerPoint [www.careerpointma.org], which focuses on employment. Baystate Health [<http://baystatehealth.com/Baystate>], which houses the local entity health service department. A particularly important one is the BHN, the Behavior[al] Health Network [<http://behavioralhealthnetwork.net>], which, as we’ve seen, there is a direct connection between mental health, substance abuse, and crime. And there’s a lot of other agencies that we work with as well.

Our After Incarceration Support [Systems] service . . . we have 19 full-time workers that work outside of the facility—and just to give you an idea—in the last fiscal year, we had 2,000 ex-inmates that took advantage of their services. So you can

see from the Hampden County perspective our commitment to after-incarceration support services.

Based on our history of exchanging information on the CORI side, we want to move in, with the help of BJA technical assistance and with the particular assistance of the SEARCH [The National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics, www.search.org] folks and some monetary aspects that they are going to help us with, we want to get information out to these service providers from a query perspective. And we want to share information, the results of our LSI survey, visiting information, and we want to allow it to be accessed through from a query portal perspective.

We have one particular report, *Offender Assessment Summary*, which I think contains vital information that I think would be a big help to the services providers; that's our initial effort in sharing of information. We want to allow the service providers to query and obtain a copy of that.

From a future perspective, we would like to—from a [Global] Justice Reference Architecture [JRA, <http://it.ojp.gov/default.aspx?area=nationalinitiatives&page=1015>] perspective—have a two-way exchange; particularly, I want to mention ID cards. ID cards are a very important thing to an inmate as he's released. He can't do anything without an official ID card. We want to notify the Registry of Motor Vehicles prior to the inmate being discharged, and we want to get that in motion so that as the inmate is discharged, he can walk into a situation with an ID card at his ready . . . vital aspect to him, save time, energy and make the inmate [feel] important, he's important, he's got an ID card.

Baystate Medical [Center], we do daily exchanges with them, whether it be actual health issues or behavioral health issues, we like to notify their service providers of an inmate with a particular mental health situation that we feel has a high chance of reoffending, that he's coming out. Here are his records, here's what he has done in jail, here's his medication compliance and here's . . . we think this guy's a risk, please help us to maintain this person in the community so that he doesn't reoffend.

And why are we doing this? It is to improve public safety. Sheriff Ashe and the intercounty sheriff's department [WMSIN] are committed to public safety. We want to enhance our reentry efforts. We want to use this cutting-edge technology, and basically it's the right thing to do.

What are some of the challenges? Obviously from a CORI to CORI agency perspective there's no real privacy issues, but when you get into a CORI agency—that being us—to a non-CORI agency—that being a service provider—there's going to be issues on privacy. Funding—we need funding on both ends of the exchange. Our IT team, they are off doing a whole host of other issues, including support on a daily basis. You can't do anything with your data without involving our IT team. No matter what type of a company that you would bring in to devise a system, they can't get anything done without having access to our IT, our data, and that involves our IT people and the technology on both ends of the exchange. I think some of these agencies are mom and

pop organizations—maybe one computer and an internet connection—and we need to look at making that work from that perspective.

Some solutions that we've come up with and hopefully we'll continue to expand this . . . on the privacy issue, at some point, we're going to have during the incarceration we will have the inmates sign a waiver. We try to establish a good rapport with the inmates, and we feel a good majority of those inmates will sign waivers to allow us to exchange information with the service providers. And the BJA technical assistance team is continuing to develop information-sharing guidelines to inform our team on what is legal to share at a federal level.

In this day and age with budgets and state budgets being cutback, the funding will continue to be a source of an angst for us, and we are continuing to look outside of our budget for sources.

Our IT team needs to be supportive, be patient, and hopefully, to get a window of opportunity where we can have one of our IT people liaison with the vendor and make these exchanges happen. And I had mentioned on the technology on both ends, initially we are going to go for that query aspect; we're going to allow service providers to query our department, and then at some point futuristically with additional funds will go to a two-way exchange from a JRA perspective.

Some of the lessons that I've learned in my 7-plus years of exchanging information is that you can't control another department or an agency; you can basically control your own agency but you can't control another department. The other agencies' resources or interests always do not match your own. You may think it's the greatest thing since sliced bread, but they might not be available or see it from your perspective. Fear from other agencies—you know, who is going to see my data? That is something you have to work through—and we still have issues on our CORI exchange. There is one particular agency that only shares a certain part of its data and doesn't share the whole thing. And one thing you are going to run into if you ever want to get into this is everyone is interested in your data, but very, very reluctant to share their own data.

From the impact performance, what do we want to gain from our project here with the assistance of the BJA? We want to look at our recidivism rate. We feel we do great in that area but we feel that if we are doing a healthy exchange, recidivism rates will get better. We want to watch our productivity level. Obviously, if you don't have staff doing this information flow and it's an automatic query, hopefully we'll have staff available to do other jobs. The productivity of the community providers—hopefully, we are going to lessen the burden on them as well and help them from a budgetary perspective. We are going to watch for an increase in inmates that are interested in these programs and program completions and placements in those programs. I think it's important that—to watch that and see what type of business this service agency is doing with our inmates and [ask,] "Has it gone up since we've been pushing our data out." And we want to watch for requests from other providers to participate. If there is a big interest, which I've seen on the CORI side, you know one agency will talk to another and then, all of a sudden, I

will get a call and [someone will say,] "I heard the state police are getting this information from you. I'd like to be onboard too." I think we'll probably come in to that as well from a service provider perspective.

All in all, that's the Hampden County Sheriff's Department's efforts to date. We appreciate the opportunity through BJA to allow us to make this information public. Thank you very much.

Chris Traver: Thank you, John, for being here and for sharing this with us today. You've been listening to John

Kenney, the Assistant [Deputy] Superintendent of Special Operations for the Hampden County Sheriff's Department in Ludlow, Massachusetts. Thank you.

Closing: Thank you for taking the time to join us for this conversation. If you found the discussion interesting, we encourage you to visit the BJA web site for more innovative ideas and best practices at www.ojp.gov/BJA. From all of us here at BJA, thank you for tuning in to today's podcast. We hope you will join us again for another edition of BJA's Justice Podcast Series.

CONTACT US

Bureau of Justice Assistance
Office of Justice Programs
810 Seventh Street NW.
Washington, DC 20531
Phone: 202-616-6500
Toll free: 1-866-859-2687
E-mail: AskBJA@usdoj.gov
Web site: www.ojp.gov/BJA