



FRIENDS OF JUSTICE RESEARCH & STATISTICS

DRAFT – FOR CIRCULATION AND SIGN ON

February XX, 2024

The Honorable Kay Granger
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

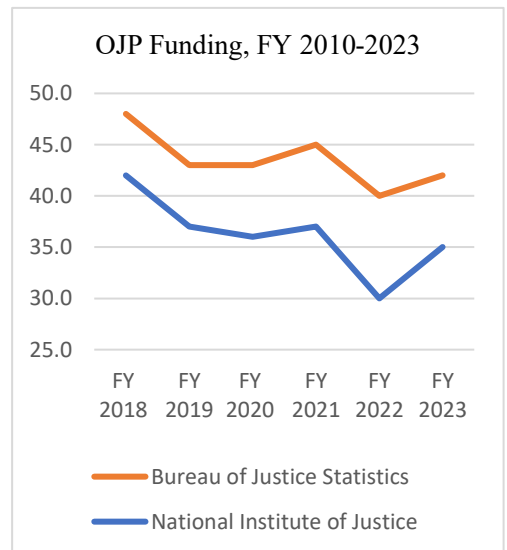
The Honorable Susan Collins
Vice Chair, Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairs Granger and Murray, Ranking Member DeLauro, Vice Chair Collins:

On behalf of the **XX** undersigned organizations, we write to urge the highest possible funding level in the final FY 2024 Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations bill for the **National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) within the Department of Justice**. Specifically, we ask that Congress appropriate no less than the Senate level of \$35.5 million for the National Institute of Justice and \$42.5 million for the Bureau of Justice Statistics (totaling \$78 million for the Research, Evaluation, and Statistics account within the Office of Justice Programs). NIJ and BJS collectively serve as the research and data-gathering arm of the Department of Justice, filling an important role in helping to understand and implement science-based strategies for crime prevention and control.

We appreciate the financial constraints placed on the budget this year and that tough tradeoffs will need to be made. However, we urge you to reject the funding levels proposed in the earlier House bill that would cut NIJ and BJS by 29 percent and 17 percent, respectively. These critical agencies, which have been operating under significant financial strain for several years, require predictable funding, as contained in the Senate CJS bill, in order to support the research and data needs of the Department of Justice.

We greatly appreciate the Subcommittees’ leadership in restoring a portion of the cuts that were taken by the agencies in recent years. However, each remains significantly under-resourced due to the accrued impact of years of declining budgets and the ever-increasing demand for more information and data. As you know, our nation’s justice system has reached an inflection point as we work to balance the continued pursuit of effective strategies to prevent and control crime, support law enforcement personnel, and advocate for victims with the need to confront the long-term effects of mass incarceration, over-policing, and racism in our legal system. It is more important than ever to invest in criminal justice research and data collection to develop a rigorous evidence base that can help inform equitable and just policies.



Highlighted below is additional information about the unique roles and needs of NIJ and BJS.

National Institute of Justice

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) provides funding for research, development, and evaluation activities at institutions across the U.S. to help shed light on the most pressing issues facing our nation’s criminal justice system today, including drivers of domestic radicalization, responses to the opioid epidemic, improving school safety, and fostering positive relationships between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Despite the nation’s growing need for objective, science-backed solutions, NIJ’s budget has been on a gradual decline for more than a decade. Funding shortfalls limit NIJ’s ability to support dissemination activities that aim to ensure evidence stemming from NIJ investments translate to improvements in policies and practices that promote public safety and equitable access to justice on the ground. In addition, due to a lack of purchasing power, NIJ was not able to issue funding solicitations in FY 2022 on topics such as: the intersection of homelessness and the criminal justice system; preventing and mitigating the impact of mass shootings; victimization experiences of immigrant populations; White collar crime; and social science research related to forensic science.

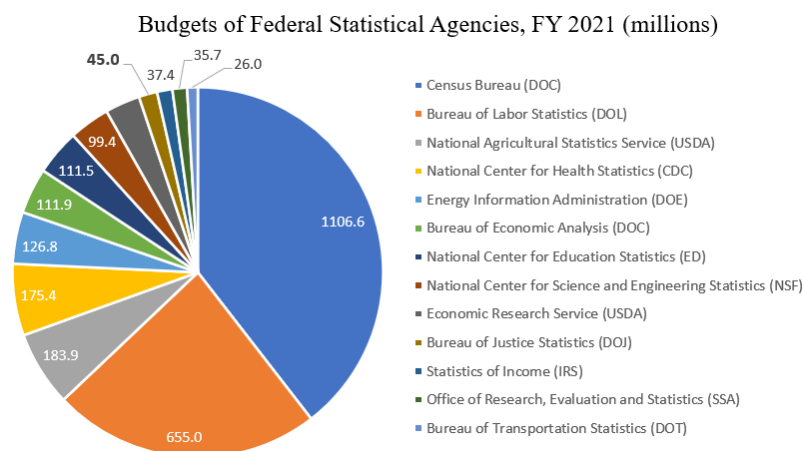
For FY 2024, the justice research and statistics stakeholder community urge Congress to appropriate no less than \$35.5 million for the National Institute of Justice, consistent with the Senate level.

Bureau of Justice Statistics

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) produces high-quality data on many aspects of the United States criminal justice system, including corrections, courts, crime type, law enforcement personnel and expenditures, federal processing of criminal cases, Indian country justice statistics, and victims of crime. As the Department’s principal statistical agency—one of 13 federal principal statistical agencies—BJS is bound by a unique set of responsibilities and standards that governs its role in producing data that is relevant, objective, trustworthy, and timely.¹

Despite growing demand from policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders for high-quality criminal justice data across an expanding array of variables, BJS has also faced significant budgetary challenges over the past decade. Since FY 2010, the BJS budget has decreased by 30%, not accounting for inflation. Steady declines in funding have resulted in antiquated systems and, especially, staffing shortfalls, which can only be resolved through sustained investment. Further, despite its growing responsibilities, BJS is among the smallest of the 13 principal statistical agencies (see chart).

Inadequate funding means that data are not being collected on major segments of the criminal justice system. For example:



¹ <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/24810/principles-and-practices-for-a-federal-statistical-agency-sixth-edition>

- Racial and ethnic data are not captured in a standard manner across regions and agencies, making it difficult to get an accurate national picture of racial disparity. Further, many policies that may have a disparate impact on communities of color or low-income individuals (i.e., fees, fines, voter disenfranchisement) are not well documented.
- Data on mental health and substance use and their connection to incidents of crime is not well documented.
- Data on prosecution and sentencing is largely nonexistent, including information on how fines, conditions of supervision, and mandatory treatments are applied.
- Little is known about how law enforcement officer wellbeing impacts their work or ability to connect with and gain the trust of their community.

An appropriation of no less than \$42.5 million in FY 2024 would allow the agency to maintain much of its current programming. However, in order for BJS to modernize data collection and dissemination systems, hire necessary experts, and begin to develop the next generation of statistical products to keep pace with the ever-changing criminal justice landscape and fill critical knowledge gaps, new investments will be needed in the future.

Thank you again for your consideration of this request. Please contact Wendy Naus (wnaus@coffa.org) at the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[organizational sign-ons]

Cc: The Honorable Hal Rogers
The Honorable Matt Cartwright
The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
The Honorable Jerry Moran