

To: Amy Blasher, Federal Bureau of Investigation UCR Program Manager
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From: Executive Board of the American Society of Criminology
Chris Eskridge, Director

Date: November 20, 2020

We are writing to applaud the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for investing in the improvement of the Uniform Crime Report Program (UCR). The shift from a summary system to an incident-based system will provide massive increases in the ability of the UCR data to illuminate the crime problem. The Supplementary Homicide Statistics (SHR) are perhaps the most used and influential component of the Summary System, in large part because it is incident based and affords greater flexibility for analysis purposes. With the full implementation of the National Incident Based System (NIBRS), this flexibility and increased detail will be available for the full range of crimes available in the UCR. There is no question this was the right thing to do.

As January 2021 approaches, however, the leadership and membership of the American Society of Criminology (ASC) are becoming increasingly concerned about the potential disruption of the UCR Program as the system moves from aggregate to incident-based reporting. As you know, the data from the UCR Summary System are one of the most important sources of information on crime used by criminologists and policy makers throughout the nation. Our concern is that transition to the incident-based system will result in a large number of localities not contributing data or contributing incomplete information for some unknown period of time. This will result in disruption in the times series at the national, state and local levels and with the absence of data for many jurisdictions. These gaps in the data could seriously diminish the ability of our members to conduct research for building theory and developing policy at the national, state and local levels.

With such a sweeping change in such a broad-based system (over 18,000 contributing agencies), there is bound to be a temporary loss of some functionality. For this reason, improvements in any statistical system are typically accompanied by steps to minimize or compensate for these losses in functionality. Our concern is heightened by the fact that we do not know what these losses will be and what steps are being considered to ameliorate them. The FBI and the Bureau of Justice Statistics' (BJS) NCS-X program have done a good job encouraging the participation of local police agencies who provide the data and preparing them for the transition. We ask that, in keeping with the recommendation of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), you do the same for constituencies that are loyal consumers and users of this information. ASC, as the largest membership association of criminologists in the world, is one of those constituencies.

We hope that in early 2021, when the extent of missing data and irregularities in the new system becomes apparent, you will communicate that to us and other user groups. We also hope that you will share with us your plans for estimation during the transition, as well as, planned imputation and other amelioration strategies to help us through the implementation period. We know that the Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS)

division of the FBI and BJS have been working on these problems and it will help to know what they are planning. With this information in hand, we can reach out to our membership, perhaps in collaboration with the FBI and BJS, to provide a much more informed picture of the transition that will reduce the anxiety that our members feel about potentially losing this valued source of information on crime and justice.

We wish you continued success in the transition to incident-based reporting in the UCR and look forward to conversations about how we can support those efforts, while ensuring continuity in the UCR data series that our membership has used for so long.