

## Improving Justice Programs through Science Act

The *Improving Justice Programs through Science Act* would permanently establish a Science Advisory Board (the Board) within the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) at the Department of Justice to better integrate scientific knowledge to inform crime reduction nationwide and provide scientific backing and evidence-based policies in the OJP's programs and activities.

The Board was chartered by the Obama Administration in 2010 and provided OJP with guidance in a number of proactive criminal justice reform efforts, including:

- Procedural justice and building trust between police and communities;
- The importance of trauma-informed care; and
- Youth brain development and implications for juvenile justice programs.

During its existence, the Board has made numerous contributions to the public safety investments of OJP. These efforts have recently produced a number of useful products, including guidelines for implementing and evaluating place-based crime reduction interventions, a checklist for police departments to enhance communications with communities about their operations and successes, and strategies to bolster response rates in surveys on criminal justice practices.

The Trump Administration, however, did not convene the Board for over a year until finally disbanding it in December 2018.

**Bill Summary:** The *Improving Justice Programs through Science Act* would:

- Establish a Science Advisory Board comprised of 26 criminologists and criminal justice researchers appointed by the Attorney General for terms of four years;
- Require the Board to meet on a regular basis to discuss science, research, and ongoing criminal and juvenile justice departmental activities and coordinate with other Federal, State, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector partners; and
- Require the Board to advise the Assistant Attorney General on policy development, program implementation and evaluation, identify research needs and opportunities, and make policy recommendations.

The bill also aligns with report language in the CJS bills for fiscal years 2020 and 2021 encouraging the Justice Department to re-establish the Board.<sup>1</sup>

**Endorsements:** The Center American Progress, Crime and Justice Research Alliance, Consortium of Social Science Associations, American Psychological Association, American Sociological Association, American Statistical Association, and Center for Science and Democracy at the Union of Concerned Scientists support the bill.

If you have any questions or if your boss would like to cosponsor the bill, please email Trelaine at [Trelaine\\_Ito@schatz.senate.gov](mailto:Trelaine_Ito@schatz.senate.gov).

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<sup>1</sup> "Science Advisory Board.—The Committee recognizes the contributions of OJP's Science Advisory Board [Board] and encourages the re-establishment of the Board. The Board worked to provide extra-agency review of, and recommendations for, OJP's research, statistics, and grants program. The re-established Board should be comprised of scholars and practitioners in criminology, statistics, sociology, and practitioners in the criminal and juvenile justice fields and should be tasked with ensuring the programs and activities of OJP are scientifically sound and pertinent to policymakers and practitioners."