

Regional Information Sharing Systems (RISS) Program
A Proven Resource for Law Enforcement

Fiscal Year 2014 Testimony to the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related
Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations, United States House of Representatives

Submitted by Donald F. Kennedy, Jr., Chair, RISS National Policy Group

The **Regional Information Sharing Systems (RISS) Program** helps thousands of criminal justice agencies save lives, solve crimes, and prosecute offenders. RISS has served the nation for almost 40 years, providing secure information and intelligence sharing capabilities, investigative and analytical services, and officer safety deconfliction. During these difficult fiscal times, law enforcement agencies have experienced reductions in funding and manpower. Agencies turn to and rely on RISS for its resources and support. In FY2012, **RISS's funding was reduced 40 percent**, exacerbating an already critical situation. Meanwhile, the **demand for RISS's services continued to increase**. "RISS is one of the most cost-effective resources out there." "RISS is like an extra officer in our department." "RISS—The most important working tool for law enforcement to combat criminal activity and terrorism." These statements are examples of what officers are saying about RISS. It is critical that RISS receive appropriate funding to continue its support for these officers and our criminal justice community. It is respectfully requested that you **restore RISS's FY2013 and FY2014 funding to its FY2011 level of \$45 million**.

Although a number of RISS's services were reduced or eliminated in FY2012, RISS strived to maintain its critical services and resources, such as the RISS Secure Intranet (RISSNET), the RISS Criminal Intelligence Databases (RISSIntel), analytical services, and the RISS Officer Safety Event Deconfliction System (RISSafe). Without restored funding, RISS's ability to provide these services, support the growing needs of law enforcement, and respond to the increased demand for services will diminish, ultimately impacting law enforcement efforts to solve crimes and safeguard communities.

RISS consists of six regional centers and the RISS Technology Support Center. The centers tailor their services to meet the needs of their unique regions while working together on nationwide issues. RISS is a proven, innovative, cost-effective, and evidence-based program that is used and trusted by thousands of local, state, federal, and tribal criminal justice agencies. RISS serves hundreds of thousands of officers and public safety professionals in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, Australia, Canada, England, and New Zealand. According to a sheriff in Nebraska, "RISS provides resources that we could not otherwise afford, such as equipment and information sharing services. RISS resources help our agency operate more efficiently, and without them, we would not be where we are today."

RISS Provides Secure Information, Investigative, and Intelligence Sharing Capabilities

Historically, law enforcement and criminal justice agencies encountered obstacles related to information sharing, communications, and technology. Many agencies individually held pieces of information about criminals and their activities but lacked a mechanism to securely collect and exchange information. Consequently, the law enforcement community's response to criminal activity was often duplicative and limited. In 1997, RISS developed **RISSNET**, a secure

infrastructure for law enforcement and criminal justice agencies to share information across jurisdictions. **RISSNET is the only nationwide Sensitive But Unclassified (SBU) law enforcement information sharing cloud provider governed by its users.**

RISSNET houses millions of pieces of data, offers bidirectional sharing of information, and connects disparate state, local, and federal systems. Agencies can easily connect to RISSNET, share information and intelligence in a secure environment, and query multiple systems simultaneously. Our nation's public safety mission requires an interoperable information sharing environment to proactively solve crimes. RISSNET is a major component in meeting this need.

RISSNET also serves as the secure communications infrastructure for a number of critical resources and investigative tools. Currently, **86 systems are connected or pending connection** to RISSNET. There are more than **350** RISS and partner resources available via RISSNET to authorized users; the owners of these resources rely on RISSNET for its secure infrastructure. By connecting agencies and systems to RISSNET, rather than funding the build-out of new stand-alone information systems, hundreds of millions of dollars are saved and millions of data records are easily and quickly accessible by law enforcement. A Pennsylvania police officer said, "Connectivity to RISSNET is absolutely critical to solving multijurisdictional crimes."

Examples of RISS-developed resources accessible via RISSNET include RISSIntel, RISSafe, the RISS Officer Safety Website, the RISS National Gang Program (RISSGang), the RISS Automated Trusted Information Exchange (ATIX), RISSLeads, the RISSLinks data-visualization and link-analysis tool, the RISS Center websites, and secure e-mail.

RISSIntel—The RISSIntel user interface provides for **real-time, online federated search of 34 RISS and partner intelligence databases**, including state systems, the California gang intelligence system (CalGang), and systems connected via the National Virtual Pointer System (NVPS), and does not require the RISSNET user to have a separate user account with the respective partner systems. This simplified sign-on approach enables officers to save time and quickly retrieve critical information. In FY2012, RISSIntel contained almost **2.8 million** intelligence records (not including the multitude of records available through connected partner systems), and users made more than **4.7 million** inquiries in RISSIntel.

RISSGang—The RISSGang Program is the only comprehensive gang resource that offers a criminal intelligence database, informational resources, and a secure bulletin board. The RISSGang criminal intelligence database provides law enforcement agencies with access to gang information, including suspects, organizations, weapons, photographs, and graffiti. RISS has connected and continues to connect gang systems. For example, in FY2011, RISS completed a system-to-system interface between RISSIntel/RISSGang and CalGang, enabling authorized users to initiate a federated search. In addition, in FY2012, RISS completed the connection of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' GangNET.

RISS ATIX—After September 11, 2001, the public safety community voiced concerns regarding their limited ability to securely communicate and share information with law enforcement and other critical infrastructure entities. In FY2002, RISS developed RISS ATIX, which provides a secure platform for law enforcement, public safety, and private sector entities

to share disaster, terrorism, and other information. RISS ATIX supports more than **200,000** public safety professionals and consists of more than **40** community groups. RISS ATIX resources include secure web pages, a discussion forum, a document library, and secure e-mail.

Each RISS Center maintains a secure website to provide users with easy access to RISSIntel, other RISSNET resources, and other resources, such as the Cold Case Locator and the RISS Pawnshop Database. The number of investigative records available through these different systems exceeds **28 million**.

RISS's Nationwide Impact

RISS's unique structure helps meet the needs of local, state, and tribal law enforcement while partnering with federal agencies on a number of nationwide initiatives. For example, RISS is the only nonfederal entity participating in the **Assured SBU Interoperability Initiative** under the auspices of the White House and the Office of the Program Manager, Information Sharing Environment (PM-ISE). This initiative seeks to expand federated access to resources and to provide simplified sign-on capabilities for officers to access multiple systems simultaneously. RISS is at the forefront in providing simplified, federated access. More than **10,000 users** from trusted partner systems are using Federated Identity to access RISSNET resources, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Law Enforcement Online, the Chicago Police Department, and the Pennsylvania Justice Network.

RISS currently supports **1,072** federal member agencies. Examples of RISS's partnerships with federal agencies and programs include the FBI National Gang Intelligence Center, the PM-ISE, the United States Attorneys' Offices, the U.S. Department of State, the Diplomatic Security Offices, the United States Secret Service's Targeted Violence Information Sharing System, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, and the National Motor Vehicle Title Information System. RISS also supports the **Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative** by connecting systems to RISSNET and hosting individual state servers. RISS built and hosts the **NVPS** Message Hub to provide access to the NVPS participant agencies and to RISS member agencies that submit records to the RISSIntel databases via RISSNET. There are **10 databases** connected through NVPS. RISS continues to connect **fusion centers** to RISSNET, integrate RISS services and tools into fusion center operations, and provide training opportunities. Most recently, RISS was mentioned in the *National Strategy for Information Sharing and Safeguarding*, released by the White House in December 2012. RISS and the other entities listed in the report have made significant strides in leveraging partnerships and technology to enhance the information sharing environment.

RISS continuously seeks and is sought out by others to enable new information sharing partnerships that leverage its secure SBU information sharing capabilities. For example, in FY2012, RISS deployed and provided users with access to the **Federal Law Enforcement Training Center** Electronic Learning Portal. In addition, several state **Medicaid Fraud Control Units** are using RISSNET to securely share information, lessons learned, and other information to help in their detection and prosecution efforts. More than 26 secure collaboration sites are housed on RISSNET for partnering organizations.

RISS is supported by many law enforcement organizations, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Sheriffs' Association, the National Narcotic Officers' Associations' Coalition, and the National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations. RISS's partnerships have resulted in an unprecedented level of information and intelligence sharing.

RISS Enhances Officer Safety Through Deconfliction

More than 19,000 law enforcement officers have died serving our nation. At the current rate, one officer is killed every 53 hours in the United States. Officer safety is of paramount importance to the law enforcement community and the citizens they serve. The RISS policy boards recognized this critical need and voiced the need for a nationwide deconfliction system.

RISSafe is an essential component in helping ensure officer safety. RISSafe stores and maintains data on planned law enforcement events and identifies and alerts affected agencies and officers of potential conflicts impacting law enforcement efforts. Since RISSafe's inception in 2008, more than **615,000 operations** have been entered, resulting in more than **208,000 identified conflicts**. Currently, **23 RISSafe Watch Centers** are operational, 17 of which are operated by organizations other than RISS, such as state agencies, fusion centers, and High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA). These organizations have invested resources to support this critical nationwide officer safety program. The interaction between RISSafe and RISSIntel provides comprehensive officer safety event and subject deconfliction services. Many agencies have adopted internal policies mandating the use of RISSafe. In FY2012, RISS introduced **RISSafe Mobile**, which enables officers to access RISSafe from their smartphones and other mobile devices.

RISSafe is the only comprehensive and nationwide deconfliction system that is accessible and monitored on a 24/7/365 basis and available at no cost to all law enforcement agencies regardless of RISS membership. RISSafe continues to proliferate throughout the country, with demand for its use increasing each day. **It is impossible to put a cost to the number of officers RISSafe has already prevented from harm or, worse, death.** A Washington police officer said, "RISS services are the basis of our department's information and intelligence-led policing efforts and also provide the critical deconfliction component vital to the safety of our officers in the field."

There are many websites containing officer safety-related information; however, in some cases, the information is outdated, inaccurate, or actually intended to harm officers. RISS's member agencies expressed an interest in accessing one location to obtain reliable and accurate officer safety information. RISS launched the **RISS Officer Safety Website**, which serves as a nationwide repository for issues related to officer safety, such as concealments, armed and dangerous threats, officer safety videos, special reports, and training.

RISS Provides Critical and Diverse Investigative Support

Many law enforcement agencies still do not have the support, resources, and/or funding to obtain analytical services, purchase investigative and surveillance equipment, send officers and personnel to training, research volumes of data, and develop intelligence briefings and other law

enforcement-sensitive documents. RISS member agencies rely on RISS for these and many other investigative support services. RISS offers full-service delivery, from the beginning of an investigation to the ultimate prosecution and conviction of criminals. A North Carolina sheriff said, “RISS represents a ‘one-stop shop’ of resources for today’s law enforcement agencies—whether the need is for criminal intelligence, technical support, or training resources. RISS offers a fantastic solution to the budgetary dilemma facing local agencies.”

Using RISS’s resources and services enables officers to—

- Simultaneously query connected intelligence databases via RISSNET.
- Retrieve information from specialized and investigative databases and resources.
- Use analytical products such as crime scene diagrams, link-analysis charts, digital forensics, and audio/video services to aid in arresting and prosecuting offenders.
- Request assistance from research staff to help sift through information, conduct research, and help identify the missing piece of the puzzle.
- Borrow specialized surveillance and investigative equipment, such as global positioning systems, customized cameras, and recording devices.
- Obtain training on new and emerging topics, such as social media, domestic terrorism organizations, and border and immigration.
- Access critical publications and law enforcement-sensitive briefings, including topics such as sovereign citizens, gun violence, narcotics, and human trafficking.

In FY2012, the RISS Centers developed **32,657** analytical products, loaned **4,597** pieces of specialized equipment, responded to **184,553** requests for research assistance, and trained **53,308** individuals. **RISS is an excellent return on investment for our nation.** Over the last 10 years, officers leveraging RISS’s services arrested more than **48,000** offenders and seized more than **\$662.3 million** in narcotics, property, and currency. As a cost-effective program, RISS benefits thousands of agencies and helps supplement their needs without compromising shrinking budgets or the support necessary to keep their communities safe. Every day, officers use RISS to help solve cases and stay safe. Statistics are only one way to see the value of RISS; the real successes come directly from agencies and officers. To view success stories from your region or state as well as other information regarding RISS, please visit www.riss.net/Impact.

It is respectfully requested that Congress restore FY2013 and FY2014 funding for RISS to the FY2011 amount of \$45 million so that this essential information sharing and public safety program can continue to serve our nation. Inadequate funding and support for RISS could diminish the nation’s information sharing environment, hinder investigations, and impact the safety of our communities. It would be counterproductive to require local and state RISS members to self-fund match requirements, as well as to reduce the amount of Bureau of Justice Assistance discretionary funding. Agencies require more, not less, funding to fight the nation’s crime problem. RISS is unable to make up the decrease in funding that a match would cause, and it has no revenue source of its own. RISS is dedicated to providing quality services, fostering interagency cooperation, and creating strong partnerships. RISS is a *Proven Resource for Law Enforcement*. Its services increase the ability to detect, prevent, identify, solve, and prosecute crime while creating a safer working environment for our nation’s law enforcement. RISS is grateful to provide this testimony and appreciates the support this committee continuously provides to the RISS Program.