

STATEMENT OF

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONCERNING

“EXAMINING MISMANAGEMENT IN OFFICE OF
JUSTICE PROGRAMS GRANTMAKING”

PRESENTED

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Connolly, and Members of the Committee: I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak with you today about the Department of Justice's (DOJ) progress in improving the operations and management of the Office of Justice Programs (OJP). I say "progress" because, as you know from my resume, I have intermittently worked in OJP and its predecessor, the Office of Justice Assistance, Research and Statistics (OJARS), since 1984. Currently, I serve as the Executive Director of the Justice Research and Statistics Association, a national nonprofit association of analysts, researchers, and practitioners throughout the justice system dedicated to providing accurate and timely information in support of sound policy development. Created by the state Statistical Analysis Centers (SACs) in 1974, JRSA works closely with the Bureau of Justice Statistics and other federal agencies to promote the effective use of criminal and juvenile justice information.

If I may, I'd like to set the context for the comments that follow. Two months and two days short of eight years ago, I testified before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House of Representatives on the same topic as I address today: the management of OJP. Then, I was inside OJP, indeed the acting head of it. Today, I am outside OJP, head of an organization that receives grants from several of the OJP bureaus, including the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), and the Office of Victims of Crime (OVC). As a consequence, I have the somewhat unique perspective of having worked within OJP to strengthen its management and now, after a lapse of six years away from the organization, coming back to view it from the outside as head of an organization that performs a significant amount of research, training and technical assistance supported by OJP grants. That permits me to comment from my present

position on whether the management improvements initiated eight years ago have persisted and, perhaps, been extended (judging, of course, from the perspective of a close, but outside, observer).

Members of this Committee with seniority may remember the management challenges confronting OJP eight years ago: significant numbers of expired grants that had not been closed out with unexpended funds reverted to the treasury; questions about the integrity of the grantmaking process and whether or not awards were properly reflective of peer reviewers' scores of competing proposals; concern over whether grants and contracts were properly monitored and audited to assure performance and uphold OJP's fiduciary responsibility to American taxpayers; and the lack of clean financial audits for OJP.

I will not rehearse my testimony of eight years ago to document the steps taken to address these and other management concerns. But I will observe that upon my departure in January 2009, OJP had a clean financial audit, the backlog of expired but unclosed grants was eliminated with all deobligated funds properly reverted to the treasury, a process was instituted that assured any deviation from peer reviewers' scores in awarding grants was clearly documented and justified by reference to publicly-announced criteria; and the Office of Audit, Assessment and Management (OAAM) was stood up, fully staffed and headed by an exceptionally talented and qualified leader.

Six years later, I returned to Washington to assume my current position, giving me an opportunity to see OJP management from the outside rather than the inside. I would like to share with you my observations and the inferences I draw from them about the trajectory of management in OJP.

First, I notice a number of new features of the grantmaking process which I heartily applaud. OJP now posts on its website a *Funding Resource Center* listing all upcoming, current, and closed opportunities. This allows associations like mine to plan ahead, assemble good teams, and write excellent proposals to perform needed work on behalf of OJP bureaus.

I also notice that there is a considerable degree of uniformity across solicitations issued by OJP bureaus with common performance and reporting requirements, common scoring criteria for proposals, and a common set of statutory and financial management requirements. Equally pleasing to me is the longer window of time between the issuance of a solicitation and the deadline for proposal submission; short deadlines disadvantage newer and smaller organizations that often have the most innovative ideas.

And I've noticed that OJP now routinely returns to each applicant, successful or not, the peer reviewers' comments on his or her proposal; in the past, applicants had to request peer reviewers' comments (and they were often delayed as bureau staff edited the comments). In fairness, any organization that takes the time to write a grant application deserves prompt and complete feedback on their proposal so that they have the opportunity to improve.

All of these changes encourage more applicants to apply and increase the chance that taxpayer dollars will go to those with the most innovative ideas and the strongest subject matter expertise on their teams – a sign of good management.

Supporting these improvements in the application process is a much more detailed and accessible Grants Management System (GMS) with an extensive Online Training Tool providing step-by-step guidance for meeting the OJP-specified reporting requirements and making necessary adjustments to projects as they unfold through submission of Grant Adjustment Notices (GANs). The detailed online training offered to every grantee, at a time of their

convenience, is an enormous aid to grantees with everything clearly spelled out through step-by-step instructions. Again, a sign of good management.

And finally, I would like to comment on a small change, but one that says a great deal about the integrity of the current grantmaking process in OJP. Since my return to Washington, I have noticed something new: bureau heads and program managers will not meet with the head of an organization while a solicitation is open to which the organization may respond with a proposal. Every applicant plays on a level playing field whether they hover on Downtown, the Beltway, or the Heartland. No preferential treatment, no insider access during proposal writing – a sign of good management.

As I commented at the beginning, I am no longer in a position where I can knowledgeably comment on the specific management practices currently deployed in OJP. But I can make inferences from what I observe as one who does business with OJP on a now regular basis. My inference from what I have witnessed these past eighteen months is that the trajectory of management improvement that I testified to in September 2008 continues; and I applaud those responsible for carrying on in OJP a culture of continuous improvement.