



# ADDRESSING YOUR PRIORITIES

## INTRODUCTION

At the 2007 National Forum on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, criminal justice policy-makers and practitioners from across the country gathered in regional caucuses to discuss what they considered to be the most pressing issues facing the criminal justice community in their respective regions (Northeastern, Southern, Midwestern and Western). These priorities guided the work of the NCJA Advisory Council and staff over the course of the year.

**The top issues that participants cited included: gangs and the increase in urban violence; offender reentry; information sharing; sex offender management; mental health issues; and balancing and managing resources.**

Throughout the year, the *NCJA Justice Bulletin* addressed these issues through weekly in-depth coverage of developments affecting state and local criminal justice. Features included congressional updates, research findings, and state and local program implementation and evaluation. Each issue of the *Bulletin* focused either on Government Affairs; Promising Practices; New Research or NCJA News and provided coverage on all the priorities. NCJA staff also provided training and technical assistance (e.g. Community Based Strategic Planning) and participated in committees, seminars, and special sessions on emerging issues and promising practices. A list of the NCJA accomplishments specific to each priority is provided below:

### GANGS/INCREASE IN URBAN VIOLENCE

All four regions called the issue of criminal gangs and increased urban violence a top priority. This priority included finding ways to combat increased youth involvement in crime and gang activity; the prevalence of gangs in prison and jails, and incarceration as a precursor to gang involvement.

#### Accomplishments

- ❖ Finding ways to address and combat violent crime was chosen as the theme of the 2008 National Forum.

- ❖ Developed and distributed an issue paper to Congress that focused on combating gangs. The paper defined the issue and included examples of successful programs in California, Maryland, Nevada, South Carolina and Wisconsin

- ❖ Engaged with congressional committee staff on various anti-gang bills introduced in Congress.

- ❖ Ran an article in the September *Justice Bulletin* promising practices issue highlighting a gang program in Nevada called the Southern Nevada Community Gang Task Force.

- ❖ Convened stakeholder organizations and congressional staff in discussions around policy goals and legislative strategy.

- ❖ Reaffirmed the NCJA policy statement: Addressing Fear and Violence in Communities at the Board of Directors meeting on April 24, 2008.

### OFFENDER REENTRY

The successful reentry of incarcerated persons (juvenile and adult offenders) back into the community was shared as a top concern in multiple regions.

## Accomplishments

- ❖ Developed and distributed an issue paper to Congress that focused on offender reentry. The paper defined the issue and included examples of successful programs in New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Tennessee.
- ❖ NCJA staff involvement on the National Governors Association Prisoner Reentry Committee
- ❖ Participated in the push by the offender reentry coalition for passage of the Second Chance Act.
- ❖ Engaged key congressional staff on issues of importance to the states and on funding for the demonstration grant programs starting in FY09.
- ❖ Ran an article in the June *Justice Bulletin* promising practices issue highlighting a reentry program in Kansas. In addition, another article in the January issue examined how governors were tackling reentry issues in their respective states.

## INFORMATION SHARING

The effective sharing of data and other criminal justice information sharing was another top priority. Issues included regional sharing of data, accompanying policy issues of privacy standards, quality, timeliness and the analysis of data and general lack of information due to conflicting state laws and the use of different technologies within each state.

## Accomplishments

- ❖ Revised the NCJA policy statement: Information Technolo-

gy and the Criminal Justice System at the Board of Directors meeting on April 24, 2008.

- ❖ Developed and distributed an issue paper to Congress focusing on justice information sharing. The paper defined the issue and included examples of successful programs in California, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Hampshire, South Carolina and Wisconsin.
- ❖ Administered the Justice Information Sharing Practitioners (JISP) Network—an organization directed by information sharing practitioners from around the country and created solely to serve the needs of other justice information sharing practitioners. Membership in JISP includes participation in a “virtual” peer-to-peer network made up of over 700 practitioners, representing all criminal justice disciplines, from the local, state, regional, and tribal levels. Members have access to a “members-only website” at [www.jispnet.org](http://www.jispnet.org), a national practitioner directory, information regarding national standards and training and a quarterly newsletter.
- ❖ Participated in Justice Training and Technical Assistance Coalition (JTTAC) monthly conference calls (representing all national justice information sharing training and technical assistance providers).
- ❖ Distributed information about national standards and documents pertaining to privacy and other policy issues.
- ❖ Participated in the U.S. Department of Justice Global Justice Information Sharing Advisory Committee (Global) – NCJA board member Robert

Boehmer serves as chair, NCJA President David Steingraber represents the National Governors’ Association and NCJA Executive Director Cabell Cropper represents the NCJA on this committee.

- ❖ Deputy Executive Director Kay Cohen developed curriculum and, in partnership with the IJIS Institute, trained future trainers on the National Information Exchange Model (NIEM). Senior Staff Associate, Tammy Woodhams participated in that training and also worked with the IJIS Institute to develop case studies regarding NIEM adoption and use models from around the country.
- ❖ Ran an article in the April *Justice Bulletin* promising practices issue highlighting Virtual Alabama, an online 3D database for first responders. In addition, another article in the October issue highlighted a Noblis project that looked at regional law enforcement information sharing systems.

## SEX OFFENDER MANAGEMENT

Another priority identified by the regional caucuses was sex offender management. Issues included housing and employment opportunities for released sex offenders and issues surrounding the implementation of the Adam Walsh Act, including funding and the integration of tribal nations into the system.

## Accomplishments

- ❖ With the National Congress of American Indians, NCJA convened a meeting of state and local government groups to identify

issues of common concern to include in NCJA's submission to the SMART Office on the proposed Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA) guidelines, and to begin addressing issues of tribal integration into the states' sex offender management systems.

- ❖ Developed and distributed an issue paper to Congress focusing on sex offender management. The paper defined the issue and included examples of successful programs in Arizona, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Texas.

- ❖ Laura Rogers, director, of the SMART Office in the Office of Justice Programs, briefed the NCJA Board of Directors on the pending guidelines as well as resources and assistance that is available through the SMART Office.

## MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Mental health issues including deinstitutionalization have resulted in persons with mental illness becoming involved in the criminal justice system in greater numbers, including in the corrections system. Addressing the needs of persons with mental health issues, including those with co-occurring disorders has become an increasingly urgent policy issue for the states and counties.

### Accomplishments

- ❖ Reaffirmed the NCJA policy statement: Mentally Ill Persons in the Criminal Justice System at the Board of Directors meeting on April 24, 2008.

## BALANCING AND MANAGING RESOURCES

The final top concern cited by participants included finding ways to balance and manage resources, not just federal funding versus state funding, but also the balancing of resources among competing priorities within the states. This issue is critically important at a time when limited funds are being stretched among many different priorities. With so many issues fighting for increasingly limited funding, balancing these priorities has become a much more difficult challenge.

### Accomplishments

- ❖ Developed and distributed issue papers to Congressional staffers to illustrate the importance of the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program to help state and local governments deal with some of the nation's most pressing criminal justice issues. This series of issue papers described how states have led the nation in developing solutions to national criminal justice problems, such as methamphetamine abuse; combating gangs; offender reentry; sex offender management; multi-jurisdictional task forces; and criminal justice information sharing projects; using Byrne JAG funds.

- ❖ NCJA sponsored its Annual Hill Day and a second, special Hill Day in January, to educate congressional offices on the impact of the FY08 Byrne JAG cuts to programs in the field.

- ❖ Continually update and maintain the Government Affairs section on the NCJA website.

- ❖ NCJA produces a bi-weekly electronic newsletter, *Beltway Short Takes*, which contains information on the availability of funding for justice initiatives by federal agencies and private foundations and organizations.

- ❖ NCJA provides continually updated information on funding opportunities and eligibility requirements through NCJA's consultation with the U.S. Department of Justice and its Office of Justice Programs as well as other federal agencies. NCJA also monitored federal financial management requirements for state and local grant administrators.

- ❖ Provided Community Based Strategic Planning Train the Trainer workshops focused on collaboration between state and local agencies and among community members and neighborhood institutions, and coordination of funding streams and resources to channel assets to meet diverse community needs. Training was provided to State Agency Administrators upon request and as part of the 2008 BJA Regional Conference series.

- ❖ Distributed weekly the NCJA *InfoLetter* covering U.S. Congressional and other federal government activities to the NCJA Advisory Council and tribal government members as well as the leadership of public agency, corporate and nonprofit members.

- ❖ Ran an article in the November *Justice Bulletin* promising practices issue highlighting the success of a JAG funded regional multi-jurisdictional drug taskforce on the Georgia-Alabama border.
- ❖ Sent letters and worked closely with key congressional staff on a number of key funding priorities, including:
  - » Increasing the cap on the Victims of Crime Act fund to no less than \$661 million. NCJA and 30 other groups joined in a letter to the Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) appropriations bill conferees.
  - » Restoring funding for the Drug Court Discretionary Grant Program in the FY 2008 CJS Appropriations bill.
  - » Increasing funding for the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment (SAPT) Block Grant. These letters were signed by NCJA and over 200 other national and local groups.
  - » Letters to the appropriations committees detailing NCJA members' priority criminal justice and homeland security programs for FY09 funding.
- ❖ Helped lead the coalition of stakeholder organizations seeking to restore the FY08 funding that was cut from the Byrne JAG program. Restoration efforts focused on the FY08 emergency war supplemental appropriations bill. The Senate version of the bill included

\$490 million for Byrne JAG; however, the House and final versions did not include the restoration of Byrne JAG funds. Members of Congress have indicated they will try again to restore funding in a second supplemental bill that is expected to move through Congress in September. Activities for this effort included:

- » Generating letters of support from a majority of members of the House and Senate as well as letters from the major state and local government groups, including the governors, attorneys general, mayors, counties and state legislature associations.
- » A letter of support signed by NCJA and over 30 other national stakeholder groups, as well as individual letters of support by many organizations and their respective members.
- » Over 350 stories in local and national media outlets nationwide.
- » Multiple hearings in both the House and the Senate intended to highlight the need for, and success of, the Byrne JAG program.
- » Briefings in the House and Senate for congressional staff on the Byrne JAG program.
- » Produced and developed a myriad briefings and hand-out materials for NCJA members to use in their educational and outreach efforts, including a 4-page fact sheet and talking points, on the program and the

impact of the cuts on services delivered in the field.

- ❖ Developed materials to assist NCJA members with their overall congressional advocacy efforts including: committee assignment lists; a scorecard on how each member of Congress voted on NCJA criminal justice and homeland security priorities; a chart showing the current status of the legislation NCJA is tracking; and a chart showing the funding levels for all the justice assistance and homeland security grant programs throughout each stage of the appropriations process.
- ❖ With the guidance of NCJA's informal juvenile justice work- group, developed recommendations for the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. Worked with committee staff on those issues and wrote a letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee leadership in advance of their scheduled consideration of the bill.
- ❖ Engaged with congressional staff on a number of pieces of legislation intended to support state criminal justice priorities, including a bill to facilitate the use of electronic logbooks in the tracking of methamphetamine purchases, the reauthorization of the Byrne JAG program and many other state and local priorities.

## 2008 REGIONAL CAUCUS MEETINGS

Please join us for this year's Regional Caucus meetings on Monday August 4 from 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Northeastern Region — Bluegrass 2

Southern Region — Bluegrass 1

Midwestern Region — Skybox

Western Region — Rose

To find out which region your state belongs, please see the list on page 9 of the Forum program.