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The Honorable Eric H. Holder, Jr.
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
Robert F. Kennedy Building
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Holder:

On behalf of the Science Advisory Board (SAB) of the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), I am pleased to submit the enclosed report on the activities and recommendations of the SAB during its first two years and its plans for the future.

We look forward to continuing our work to help support the agency's interest in enhancing the quality and integrity of science in its programs and activities.

Thank you for the providing the opportunity for the SAB to contribute to the quality of evidence-based programs in OJP.

Sincerely,



Alfred Blumstein, Chair
OJP Science Advisory Board

cc: James Cole, Deputy Attorney General
Tony West, Acting Associate Attorney General
Mary Lou Leary, Acting Assistant Attorney General, OJP
OJP Bureau Heads

Enclosure

OJP Science Advisory Board Report

January 22, 2013

Mission and Structure of our Work

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP) Science Advisory Board (SAB) was established under the Federal Advisory Act in August 2010, and charged by the Attorney General to, most importantly, protect and ensure scientific quality and integrity in the activities of OJP. Creation of the SAB reflects the interest of the Attorney General and of this Administration and, most directly, that of Laurie Robinson, then the Assistant Attorney General for OJP in building and promoting evidence-based policies into the operation of OJP. Since early 2011, the SAB has met semi-annually in-person for a full day in Washington DC,. However, the bulk of the SAB's work is accomplished through a subcommittee structure and numerous conference calls spread over the 2-year period.

At the SAB's first meeting on January 28, 2011, Attorney General Holder charged us with "infusing science into the DNA of the Justice Department." That certainly represents a major challenge, in large part because of the very different cultures and training that distinguish the legal community and the science community. However, we understand this charge as consistent with efforts in many sectors across government towards reliance on science and evidence to develop effective policy.

During these first 2 years, the SAB has spent much of its time learning about the agency's programs and activities to identify where it can best provide OJP with scientific and educational advice. The SAB focused on the challenges of identifying policy domains where there is sufficient knowledge to support evidence-based practices. Broadly stated, the SAB views its mission as infusing an evidence-based perspective into the work of the OJP components. This involves encouraging staff across the entire agency to continually keep in mind the importance of using evidence in shaping OJP policies and programs, and of evaluating programs to understand what works and, equally important, what does not work.

The initial subcommittee structure of the SAB included five subcommittees, three of which correspond to three of the Bureaus in OJP: the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) with a primary research mission; the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), primarily involved in developing statistics on crime, victimization, and operation of criminal justice agencies; and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), primarily concerned with preventing juvenile delinquency and enhancing the operation of the juvenile justice system. The two additional subcommittees have a broader scope. The Quality and Protection of Science Subcommittee was tasked with developing a set of principles for protecting the scientific integrity of the OJP programs, and especially the independence of the operations of the explicitly science agencies, NIJ and BJS. The fifth subcommittee is the Evidence Translation and Integration Subcommittee with a specific concern for bridging the gap between scientific findings by researchers and academics, which too often may involve unfamiliar technical terminology, to criminal justice officials and practitioners.

As the SAB moved to its second year, it became clear that there should be a sixth subcommittee focusing on the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), which is responsible for distributing the greatest amount of funding in OJP and has a broad mission to support and inform programming in criminal justice.

Also, the four Bureau Heads with related subcommittees identified appropriate experts from the academic and practitioner fields to serve as additional members of these subcommittees. The subcommittees meet in-person twice a year, typically on the day before the full SAB meeting and with related-bureau staff.

Activities and Recommendations

- **Quality and Protection of Science**

The Quality and Protection of Science Subcommittee developed a strong set of principles that emphasize independence, particularly from political interference, both in the selection of key staff, especially Bureau Directors, and in the generation and dissemination of scientific results. Too often political perspectives are used to modify or suppress scientific reports. The principles also emphasize the need for objectivity by instituting standard norms of scientific practice, particularly in the awarding of grants, which should be based solely on the quality of the research as determined by a transparent peer-review process, and in the review of final products.

Further, the principles emphasize the importance of the scientific quality of agency products, whether they are statistical reports, program evaluations, or basic science research reports. Any assessment of quality should be based on the scientific rigor of the product, the scientific impact in opening new fields of knowledge, and the relevance of the findings for strengthening and enhancing policies. The SAB has made a series of specific recommendations to OJP to achieve these principles of independence, objectivity, and quality.

In this regard, we would like to reiterate how pleased we are that the most recent draft of the Department of Justice's Scientific and Research Integrity Policy posted on the DOJ website appropriately recognizes NIJ and BJS as "science agencies," and throughout includes provisions to protect their autonomy and independence. We particularly applaud the inclusion of language that states that the NIJ and BJS research and statistics programs and other activities, as well as dissemination of findings, must be shielded from political or other similar influences. We also commend the language reflecting the vital need to promote the professional development of research scientists.

In furtherance of the goals of the DOJ policy, we applaud the Attorney General's outreach to the SAB to develop a list of possible candidates for the NIJ and BJS Director positions that have recently been vacated, and we are currently reviewing and vetting that list and hope to forward it shortly. Further, the SAB recommends that the Attorney General issue guidance that will ensure that all future NIJ and BJS Directors be selected based on strong scientific credentials as reflected in nominations elicited from the OJP SAB, as well as from a broad range of scientific and stakeholder organizations in the criminal justice field.

- **Evidence Translation and Integration**

The SAB requested the Evidence Translation and Integration Subcommittee to direct its primary attention to the various efforts being pursued in developing the Website *CrimeSolutions.gov*, which provides evaluative information to practitioners by having research experts review evaluation reports of a rich variety of programs and classifying them as "effective" in view of strong and replicated evidence, "promising" if the evidence is less compelling, and "no effect" when there is clear evidence that the program has not demonstrated its effectiveness. The SAB raised concerns that *CrimeSolutions.gov* is merely one of multiple approaches that assess the results of different evaluation studies and that those different evaluation programs could well give rise to contradictory results. A broader concern relates to the general variability in the quality of the evaluation studies that have been reviewed. OJP has taken the SAB's concerns into consideration and has made adjustments to the website. OJP also responded to the SAB's recommendations with regard to a more active outreach campaign to practitioners and the general justice community to publicize the site, leading to a significant increase in the number of visitors.

- **National Institute of Justice**

Through the NIJ Subcommittee, the SAB has directed attention to addressing the issue of the distinctive role of NIJ in the OJP context. Of all the bureaus in OJP, NIJ has the statutory mission of developing basic scientific knowledge and understanding about crime and the operation of the criminal justice system that would lead to stronger and more effective policies. It is also intended to be the home of the strongest methodological competence in OJP, and that strength should provide it with the capability of facilitating evaluation research which is needed in all other parts of OJP. As a first step in identifying a clear role for NIJ in OJP, now infused throughout with developing evidence-based practices, the SAB recommends that the OJP Assistant Attorney General convene a high level working group within OJP to consider how to best use the various recommendations outlined in a report by the NIJ Subcommittee. A second recommendation in this area is establishing a "research coordinating council" to prevent duplication of research and evaluation efforts across OJP, and to encourage additional collaboration between NIJ and the other OJP components.

- **Bureau of Justice Statistics**

The SAB was particularly concerned about the need to recruit individuals competent in statistics to serve the expanded functions of an already understaffed BJS. Individuals with those distinctive technical skills would have to be recruited from outside the Justice Department, and that became a particularly difficult challenge in the face of a Department-wide hiring freeze that permitted only intra-Department transfers. The SAB strongly recommended that exemptions for the hiring freeze be made for these BJS positions and, we understand, that BJS has subsequently been able to fill some senior statistician positions by recruiting outside the Department.

The BJS Subcommittee has been working closely with BJS with some very positive results on the redesign of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), linking data from the Uniform Crime Reports with

that of BJS, and facilitating opportunities for graduate students and early-career researchers to work with BJS data under the guidance of BJS staff.

- **Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP)**

The OJJDP Subcommittee has focused its attention on the organizational structure of the agency with an emphasis on the representation of research functions and expertise in that structure. This interest was stimulated by the discussions underway in OJJDP about reorganization as well as the Subcommittee's recognition of the importance of the role of research within this multipurpose agency. This is especially important in light of OJJDP's statutory authority and mandate to conduct research on juvenile justice and the low visibility that research in OJJDP has had in previous Administrations. The lack of a distinct organizational unit devoted to facilitating the research mission of OJJDP raised the question of whether such a unit is needed to best serve that mission. The Subcommittee conferred with a number of prior OJJDP administrators, most of whom strongly agreed that the research function should have a distinct place in the organizational structure. The results of those conversations and the perspective of the Subcommittee on this issue were reported informally to the OJJDP administration. The OJJDP reorganization plan has been recently approved and includes an Innovation and Research Division that encompasses three units, one of which is designated as Research, Evaluation, and Statistics.

- **Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)**

BJA provides leadership and services for the development of programs and criminal justice policies that support state, local, and tribal strategies to achieve safer communities. In this role of improving the functioning of criminal justice systems, BJA brings evidence-based, promising, and innovative practices to the field and stimulates innovative collaborations across the system. To assist BJA staff in these efforts, the SAB has approved the BJA Subcommittee's continuation work in two areas it has identified as fruitful projects and where the expertise of the BJA Subcommittee members can be put to good use to strengthen the science and promote activities central to the mission of BJA. These areas include (1) creating and fostering partnerships between academics and practitioners, and (2) developing of a set of principles to guide effective implementation of specific programs.

What Lies Ahead

The SAB has an important role in addressing the macro, long-term issues that will protect the quality and integrity of the science in OJP, regardless of change in leadership positions. In this regard, the SAB will continue to work toward ensuring that science remains at the forefront of the agency's activities, and that OJP retains a reputation for high quality and independent research and statistical programs. Toward this goal, the SAB will reach out to the career staff to assist them in understanding the relevance of science in the work they do every day—this includes career staff throughout the agency, not just in NIJ and BJS.

Also important in the months to come is that the SAB work together with the new leadership in OJP's two science agencies—NIJ and BJS. The SAB will meet with the new Directors shortly after they are appointed to serve as a resource for establishing strategic plans and ensuring a smooth transition from the previous research and statistics agendas.

On May 18, 2012, the Acting Director of the Office of Management and Budget issued a memorandum to the heads of all executive departments and agencies regarding the use of evidence and evaluation in the 2014 budget. This memorandum directed agencies “to demonstrate the use of evidence throughout their Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 budget submissions” and that “budget submissions also should include a separate section of agencies’ most innovative uses of evidence and evaluation.” Particular emphasis was placed on “infusing evidence into grant-making.” The SAB has a role to clearly support OJP’s efforts in this area and to provide independent input to OJP leadership as they strengthen agency evaluation capacity.

Most recently, the OJP Acting AAG requested OJP leadership to comment on the current subcommittee structure and suggest how the SAB could be more beneficial to their bureau/office. The suggestion was made that additional efforts be established to assess the strengths and weaknesses of certain cross-cutting issues and make specific recommendations to OJP on how the agency could improve its work in these areas. At the SAB’s January 11, 2013 meeting, the SAB received briefings from agency staff on three topics: data archiving, human subjects protection, and research training. The SAB looks forward to identifying how it can most usefully contribute in these areas.