

U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee Field Hearing
Wilmington, DE
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Testimony of Drewry Nash Fennell

Senator Leahy, Senator Coons, and distinguished guests, I am Drewry Fennell, Executive Director of the Delaware Criminal Justice Council. Thank you for the opportunity to tell you how federal criminal justice spending improves public safety on the ground in our state. I'd also like to share with you the exciting work we're engaged in as part of the Bureau of Justice Assistance Justice Reinvestment Initiative.

The Delaware Criminal Justice Council, which was first formed in 1968, acts as the State Administering Agency for funding from the Office of Justice Programs. The Council was created by statute, and is comprised of twenty seven criminal justice professionals, including six cabinet secretaries, the presiding judges of all the state courts, the chiefs of major law enforcement agencies, and three community representatives. Our current chair is Lieutenant Governor Matt Denn.

Here in Delaware, our communities are safer because of the funding we receive from the Office of Justice Programs. In partnership with the federal government, we are able to insure that the Delaware's criminal justice system is fair, efficient and accountable. The federal funding we distribute has a real effect in our communities. Later today, our Council will vote to award over \$4,000,000 in federal funding to state and local law enforcement, courts, corrections, victim services and community-based providers who are united in a common effort to improve public safety. After a strong strategic planning effort by the Council, we are coordinating our resources on projects that, taken together, will have a greater impact than any of them would have had as a stand-alone effort. For example, the Council prioritized funding for efforts to serve the mentally ill in the justice system and has funded a coordinated effort to help Delaware's criminal justice agencies better serve the needs of the mentally ill. Encounters between police and people with serious mental illness can be dangerous for everyone involved. Earlier this year, the Council funded mental health crisis intervention training for law enforcement, probation officers, and court personnel. As part of the same effort, federal funds support Delaware's mental health court. In addition, Delaware provides intensive services and support through its mental health courts to reduce the number of days offenders with mental illness spend in prison and psychiatric hospitals. Together, these efforts reduce recidivism, save money and improve public safety.

Building on our foundation of inter-agency cooperation and strong strategic planning, the Criminal Justice Council recently embarked on the first steps in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative, which is funded and supported by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Justice Reinvestment Initiative is a data-driven process designed to allocate and manage criminal justice resources in a cost-effective way to improve public safety. This initiative requires an enormous commitment from our governor, courts, legislative leaders and criminal justice authorities. To succeed, we must improve our information sharing capabilities; collect and analyze criminal justice data; develop

policies and strategies based on that data; and implement evidence-based policies to increase public safety. Participation in this initiative will allow Delaware to operate at a remarkable level of sophistication because we can draw on the technical capacity of our federal partners. The deep knowledge and experience of our partners at Bureau of Justice Assistance allows Delaware's decision-makers to move forward with confidence in the integrity and utility of the project. This is hard work, and the stakes are high. We are grateful for resources and commitment of the Bureau of Justice Assistance.

The data analysis and information sharing required by the Justice Reinvestment Initiative will augment our already robust law enforcement capacity in this area. Our goal is to provide information and analysis that will guide decision-making in all aspects of our justice system. A strong information sharing network will allow prevention, reentry, juvenile justice, corrections and the courts respond effectively to realities of crime in Delaware, and to be certain that their efforts are effective in reducing crime.

Our partnership with Bureau of Justice Assistance, built over long years of working together, means that every federal dollar spent on criminal justice in Delaware is closely monitored and evaluated. The Bureau of Justice Assistance brings more than funding to Delaware; they also bring technical expertise and knowledge of best practices. For us, as for many states, the move toward evidence-based programming is demanding, but with the commitment of our state's leaders and support from our federal partners, we are making excellent progress. We are the beginning stages of this important work and I look forward to speaking to you in the future about the fruits of our efforts.