

A Survey of Criminal Justice Information System Users

May 1996

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Key Points Of Report

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Overall Conclusion

Survey respondents indicated increasing overall satisfaction, but also expressed data quality concerns for the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS). Most survey respondents indicated that CJIS is critical to accomplishing their respective missions and their jobs become easier to accomplish as CJIS improves. Users surveyed included police and sheriff departments, district attorneys, parole officers, and court clerks.

Key Findings

- For users with electronic access, CJIS is generally available when needed and provides quick responses perceived as accurate. Respondents also identified errors in a broad range of data fields, and have difficulties in providing timely information to DPS.
- CJIS is not available electronically to all users, resulting in slow (manual) responses or slow (manual) data entry for the affected users. CJIS users outside of major metropolitan areas, and parole and probation officers are the primary entities without electronic access.
- Favorable opinions were expressed regarding DPS-provided training, including the DPS field representative program. However, respondents indicated that specific training needs may not be fully met. For example, more frequent training may be necessary to compensate for positions that experience high turnover.

The sample design did not intend to project survey results to all user populations. This survey, while not an audit, does provide valuable insight into the local CJIS user perspective which is important in considering overall improvements to CJIS.

Contact

Charlie Hrcir, CPA, Audit Manager (512) 479-4700



Office of the State Auditor

Lawrence F. Alwin, CPA

This survey was conducted at the request of the Criminal Justice Policy Council in accordance with the Code of Criminal Conduct, Article 60.02(j).

Section 1:

Overall, Respondents Reveal Increasing User Satisfaction but Also Data Quality Concerns

Survey respondents revealed increasing overall satisfaction, but also expressed data quality concerns for the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS). Most survey respondents disclosed that CJIS is improving, makes their jobs easier to accomplish, and is critical to accomplishing their missions. For example:

- 68 percent of respondents (48 of 71) indicated CJIS improved since 1993
- 55 percent of respondents (47 of 86) indicated CJIS made their jobs easier
- 82 percent of respondents (69 of 84) indicated CJIS is critical to accomplishing their mission

What is the Criminal Justice Information System?

CJIS is intended to provide state-of-the-art offender tracking information for operational use, policy analysis, and strategic planning. TDCJ is responsible for the Corrections Tracking System, which should maintain prisoner, parolee, and probationer information. DPS is responsible for the Computerized Criminal History system, which contains information on arrests, prosecutions, and court decisions. These two systems, and the link between them, define the Criminal Justice Information System.

Respondents also revealed concerns about data quality; collectively, they identified more than 18 different data fields with the most errors. Data field examples include dispositions (final outcomes) of arrests or prosecutions, and various identification fields such as physical descriptions, or social security and drivers license numbers. Despite identifying many data fields with problems, most respondents believed that CJIS information is accurate (88 percent, or 66 of 75 responding).

The sample design did not intend to project survey results to all user populations. This survey does provide valuable insight into the local CJIS user perspective which is important in considering overall improvements to CJIS.

Section 2:

There Are Concerns about the Timeliness and Availability of Data

Respondents indicated some problems sending information to DPS in a timely manner, and backlogs in data entry may still exist at the local level. Thirty-one percent of law enforcement respondents (26 of 83) indicated that arrest information is not provided to the Department of Public Safety (DPS) within the statutorily required seven days. Also, 29 percent of respondents (19 of 66) indicated that CJIS information may not be up to date. Nineteen percent of respondents (13 of 68) indicated there is a backlog of

processing at the local level. A small percentage (5 percent, or 6 of 118) indicated that the backlog may cover a period of up to 24 months.

CJIS appears to be generally available when needed and provides quick responses. Most (79 percent, or 22 of 28 responding) indicated that response times for automated inquiries through the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS), complex processing using fingerprints, are less than six hours. Most (90 percent, or 61 of 68 responding) indicated that response times for automated inquiries through Texas Law Enforcement Telecommunication System (TLETS) are prompt, usually within 30 seconds.

Possible CJIS Improvements:

Greater use of automation can help solve data quality problems caused by human error or slowness of data entry. This points out the need to complete plans for local users to automate data entry and reporting for CJIS. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice and DPS should also identify causes for data quality problems that are not addressed by improved automation at the point of data entry.

Section 3:

Respondents Express Basic Satisfaction with DPS Provided Training

More respondents rely on DPS-provided training (65 percent) and field service representatives (68 percent) rather than training provided by their own organization (42 percent) which is an indication of the relative importance of DPS-provided training.

Law enforcement respondents gave overall positive ratings for formal training provided by DPS. Ninety-seven percent responded with useful to very useful ratings for DPS training. The DPS field representative program also received high marks for usefulness. Of those CJIS respondents expressing an opinion, 97 percent expressed useful to very useful ratings. However, detail responses indicate that training needs may not be fully met.

Possible CJIS Improvements:

DPS should consider tailoring training classes and training delivery methods to meet needs as expressed by local users of CJIS.

Section 4:

Respondents Generally Believe Some Controls Do Exist to Protect CJIS at the Local Level

Most respondents indicated that procedures are in place to ensure that only authorized personnel have access to the System. A few of those responding (approximately nine percent) indicated a potential weakness in this area. Thirty-three percent (26 of 79 responding) indicated they did not have written policies and procedures to provide guidance to users.

Most respondents indicated that important controls are in place. To protect CJIS information, 84 percent (66 of 79 responding) indicated that criminal history reports are securely stored and appropriately destroyed. Also, a similar number (85 percent, 62 of 73) indicated controls exist to ensure only authorized users receive CJIS output. Seventy-five percent (47 of 63 responding) indicated rejected transactions are reviewed to ensure that everything entered ultimately has been processed. Sixty-one percent (41 of 67 responding) indicated that data entry is verified by someone other than the person who did the original data entry.

Possible CJIS Improvements:

Continuing evaluation of controls at the local level is important, but it can be a time consuming task. To efficiently monitor and evaluate controls at the local level for CJIS, TDCJ and DPS could develop a self-evaluation checklist for local CJIS users. This checklist could serve as an internal control evaluation tool that:

- addresses federal and state requirements that apply to local entities
- identifies weaknesses that could be corrected
- provides a periodic overview of controls for CJIS at the local level

Section 5:

Other Opportunities to Improve the System Exist

Improvements to CJIS can be made through greater use of automation. CJIS is not available to all users via electronic means, resulting in slow (manual) responses or slow (manual) data entry for the affected users. CJIS users outside of major metropolitan areas, and parole and probation officers are the primary entities without fully automated access.

A significant number of respondents said additional information in rap sheets would be helpful. Ninety-six percent (64 of 67 responding) indicated that it would be useful if rap sheets contained when and where an offender was incarcerated. A similar percentage, 97 percent (83 of 86 responding) indicated that it would be useful if rap sheets contained an offender's parole or probation status.

About half of respondents indicated that funding at the local level is a problem (45 percent, or 20 of 44 responding). A small percentage of respondents indicated a problem of coordination with between DPS and their respective agencies (19 percent, or 13 of 67 responding).

Possible CJIS Improvements:

DPS and TDCJ should consider the need to periodically ask CJIS local users about their concerns and recommendations. The DPS field representative program may be one way to routinely accomplish this task.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Objective

The objective of this report was to provide legislatively mandated assistance to the Criminal Justice Policy Council (Council) in their completion of a review of the accuracy of the data within the Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS). The survey objective was to collect information from the CJIS user perspective including user satisfaction, CJIS strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities to improve CJIS.

Scope

The survey was distributed to 244 users of the CJIS, and an overall response rate of 52 percent was attained. Those surveyed included criminal justice professionals that originate or use criminal history information. This includes users with responsibilities involving arrests (sheriff and police departments), prosecutions (district attorneys and court clerks), judicial dispositions (district clerks) and parole supervision (parole officers). Probationers were not surveyed as they are not currently CJIS users; this portion of CJIS is not completed.

Figure 1

Personnel	Surveys Mailed	Returned	Percent
Police	41	29	71%
Sheriffs	41	25	61%
District Attorneys	55	23	42%
District and Court Clerks	78	30	38%
Probation Officers	n/a	n/a	n/a
Parole Officers	29	21	72%
Overall Totals	244	128	52%

Methodology

The survey was constructed by examining the objectives of the Council and relevant operational and control issues surrounding CJIS. CJIS users reviewed the survey prior to general distribution.

The information in this report did not result from an audit. Consequently, *Government Auditing Standards* and generally accepted auditing standards do not apply.

Respondents were selected randomly. The overall sample design was not created with the intention of projecting to the populations as a whole. Accordingly, this survey provides valuable insights into the local criminal justice agency user perspective by those who responded. In order to improve CJIS overall, recommendations should also consider viewpoints from the local perspective.

Readers should be cautioned that survey results should be corroborated prior to reaching final conclusions. Also, some responses are included which do not entirely relate to CJIS. They have been included because of their relevance to criminal justice information systems overall.

We have requested the Department of Public Safety and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to assist local users in improving data quality, training, and controls where appropriate at the local level.

The State Auditor's Office also recently published *An Audit Report on The Assessment of the Criminal Justice System* (SAO Report No. 96-058, April 1996). We reported that CJIS, the State's summary information system on criminal offenders, is not fully implemented and has control weaknesses that affect data quality.

Appendix 2:

Background Information

Texas' Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) is a criminal records database that serves the needs of law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, and corrections personnel throughout Texas. It also provides a source of information for policymakers to evaluate the functioning of the criminal justice system, as well as a means to conduct non-criminal background checks for licensing or employment purposes. The Computerized Criminal History (CCH) system, the Corrections Tracking System (CTS), and the electronic link between them, define the CJIS.

Without complete, accurate, and timely information, there is a substantial risk that a decisionmaker will make an incorrect or misguided decision. As a result, criminal history records often directly determine the effectiveness of a criminal justice system in serving and protecting the public.

The 71st Legislature made sweeping changes in Texas' criminal justice records system. These changes were codified as Chapter 60 of the Code of Criminal Procedure in 1989. Chapter 60 outlines and defines the Criminal Justice Information System and assigns responsibility for CJIS:

- The Texas Department of Public Safety is responsible for recording data and maintaining the Computerized Criminal History system.
- The Texas Department of Criminal Justice is responsible for recording data and maintaining the Corrections Tracking System database.

- The Criminal Justice Policy Council is responsible for looking at the “big picture” in Texas criminal justice and providing decisionmakers with credible, accurate, practical, and nonpartisan information. The Council works with the Department of Public Safety, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, and counties to design and implement CJIS.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, criminal history records are critical to every phase of the administration of criminal justice. For example, records may:

- determine if a police officer can obtain an arrest or search warrant
- influence a prosecutor’s decision to formally charge an individual
- be a critical element in a judge’s decisions on bail and sentencing

Appendix 3:

Detailed Responses to Questions

Appendix 3.1:

CJIS users were asked: “**How would you improve the CJIS to better meet your needs?**” Selected responses to the question are as follows:

Municipal Police Departments

- Include where and when an offender was incarcerated on the rap sheet, and any parole or probation status also.
- More detailed and more complete information.
- Update the information quicker.
- Planned improvements are sufficient. I would like to see a network of AFIS here (Texas) with FBI & maybe western AFIS Network ASAP. Also, an agreement on a mug image format that could be shipped from department to department electronically.
- Add a wanted field to criminal histories. Eliminate paper forms by allowing entry of data via computer.
- Make sure that agencies that report info to CJIS turn it in complete so that there is no question as to what something means.
- More detailed information as to “where,” “when,” “charge,” and “disposition.”
- More accessible operator training.
- Have more input for mid-size agencies in NCIC 2000.
- My agency does not use CJIS enough to form an opinion.
- Get agencies on line so that we can submit easier and so that we can obtain benefits from the system.
- Easier to read or more understandable rap sheet.
- More training.

Sheriff Offices

- First off, I would try to get computer reporting, then I would try to get a direct contact line for questions such as coding information on certain type offenses. Next, I would like to see if there could be an instructor certificate that could be issued to personnel that have to instruct personnel in smaller departments, etc.
- Better rap sheets - with dispositions complete and understandable.
- Hit sheets could be easier to comprehend. They tend to confuse our personnel at times.
- Make it simpler.
- Just by having conviction information updated in a timely manner.
- Include where and when an offender was incarcerated on the rap sheet, and any parole or probation status also.
- Timeliness of data - offense codes for new penal code violations that went in effect in September 1995 were not received until November 1995; more thought given to reporting system with input from participants before rather than after procedures are implemented.
- Re-analyze especially out of county warrants or Docket CR43.

District Attorneys

- Add court and docket numbers to the rap sheets (for enhancement purposes).
- Access to all usable data.
- Ensure more complete accurate information is being reported by agencies . . . perhaps by creating a form for reporting the various stages of an arrest/case disposition. Check into AFIS/DPS fingerprint problems.
- Better communication between our office and the police departments. More accurate information by police departments on CR-43 (input form).
- Information is most useful in obtaining judgement and sentences or to contact parole or probation officers.
- It will be much better when dispositions are complete.
- Expand NCIC to all states.
- Need query by CJIS number.
- Simplification!
- The only time I find mistakes is when the arresting agency does not complete the CJIS forms correctly.
- Print-outs in order.

District Clerks and Court Clerks

- Too wide a range of codes; representatives need to agree on completion of forms; simpler supplementals.
- Straighten out data acceptance for electronic transmission. Specify exactly why hard copy is returned - do not assume a form should be rejected just because information doesn't "look right" or is blank.
- Going onto a computer system will help for reporting the information.
- Enforce compliance by all agencies.
- The offense codes are too complex. The Clerk of the Court is being asked to make a choice of the different codes. This is almost impossible without the cooperation of the District Attorney's Office.
- Download information directly from computer records without manually completing each form.

- I think that the CJIS program should be generated that when an arrest has occurred, the records should be pulled up by name, instead of TRN number. If pulled by name, it would be easier to see if the correct TRN was assigned before using it. Maybe even some sort of cross index method (could be used).
- Better coordination between reporting agencies - more detailed education at arresting agency level.

Parole Officers

- Booking inquiry should be available to all officers.
- More access to TCIC/NCIC.
- Make CJIS available in all offices - conduct necessary and required training on the correct use of CJIS.
- I would like for our agency to have access.
- By having direct access instead of going through other law enforcement agency.
- Periodic training on the changes with criminal histories and explanations.
- In-house, O.J.T., and formal DPS training.
- More frequent telecommunications in Region I.

Appendix 3.2:

CJIS users were asked: “**In what areas do you think that additional training should be provided?**” Selected responses to the question are as follows:

Municipal Police Departments

- Offense coding - more descriptive in the drug and theft areas.
- Departments need more extensive training on the proper way to fill out the CR-43 form and how to read hit sheets.
- More training by DPS regionally, enabling more training opportunities for small agencies.
- Jail personnel should be trained to understand procedure and purpose.
- Problem areas our Department may be having but are not aware of and may be corrected.
- We need more information on when classes are available so that new personnel can be trained by the experts as well as on the job.
- More regional meetings and then one or more people trained by DPS in a thorough manner, so they can relay that training to their department personnel
- We need training on understanding the screen better.
- I feel that when doing the TCIC/NCIC training this should be done as hands on training.
- How to read criminal history information annually.
- Update/refresher classes would be helpful.

Sheriff Offices

- As far as computer usage for CJIS, a more in depth class by DPS.
- There should be more TLETS schools held in Austin.

- Problem areas our Department may be having, but not aware of, and may be corrected.
- More training on entering wanted persons.
- There should be more of an on-hands training set up by DPS, and the DPS trainers should come around more often to check on and update training.
- Penal Code and IBR
- Criminal history records reporting in the use of CJIS.

District Attorneys

- All areas that we utilize are covered.
- New personnel training courses for law centers.
- On the job training
- Training should be available for actual users versus elected officials and/or department heads who do not use the system. Training for updates or changes in the forms/program.
- none (two responses)
- Additional training should be given to agencies with high employee turnover; and refresher or updated CJIS training.
- Periodic training to all prosecutors, because of the turnover of attorneys.
- Additional training classes
- Need to provide (training) to our sheriff's office . . . have constant turnover in employees.

District and Court Clerks

- (training on) dismissed cases, offenses reduced, using supplementals
- (training on) all updates or enhancements
- Clerks need to have more input into data requirements.
- Need to keep people informed of what is needed or changes made in all areas.
- The problem we have most often is that not every agency knows what to do (especially arresting agencies). For example, some arresting agencies do not give TRN#'s to defendants arrested on warrants that are not their own - or if they do give a #, they never forward the information to the appropriate filing agency.
- Training should concentrate on the newly passed HB327 Juvenile CR-43J forms. Also, since the problem has consisted with the DA's office, clerks need to be trained from lack of experience pertaining to forms. Clerks are very knowledgeable and are prepared to perform the task.
- New employee training and hands on experience

Parole Officers

- Computer training should be provided in all areas.
- Mandatory training (2 hours) for all staff - criminal justice practitioners every employee needs to be required to have the DPS 2 hour training for "criminal justice practitioners."
- CJIS data system overview, our agency's role in CJIS, individual training for selected users.
- Total training in CJIS responsibilities and usage
- Once on line, need complete training on procedures.

- I would like us to have access so that we find out just what information it can provide us.
- Criminal histories (generally)
- Completing NCIC/TCIC training for data entry clerks who input the information.
- Would like to see a DPS representative hold a class in Abilene approximately every three years to update our dispatchers with the system.

Appendix 3.3:

CJIS users were asked: “**Which data fields have the most errors?**” Selected responses to the question are as follows:

Municipal Police Departments

- Numerals
- Physical descriptions
- Conviction data
- Date of birth
- Not too many errors
- Common names (two responses)
- In TLETs, probably the VIN field for vehicles

Sheriff Offices

- Dispositions - lack of, or delayed in reporting final dispositions
- Missing data on CCH’s - Lack of SS # and even DL numbers
- Personal descriptions, no dispositions
- Offense code number
- The most errors occur when the codes used are incorrect, or the information that was provided by warrant or arrest, arrest title are incorrect
- Booking Docket, CR43
- Not obtaining sufficient information at arrest and booking
- Warrant entry

District Attorneys

- TCIC fields
- Drivers license and identification fields. Name fields are not on “soundex” and allows for response of “no record-TCIC,” when in fact a State Identification Number appears on the NCIC part.
- Dispositions (three responses)
- Suspect names, offense codes (two responses)
- Offense dates (two responses)

District and Court Clerks

- DIC-17 fields for some reason are not reporting some cases and entering TRN’s that need to be reported and already have an ‘N’ filled in the blank . . . need some way to change it to be reported.
- Prosecutor’s section is often incorrect. There is never any indication of a re-indictment by changing the TRS. Multiple duplicate listings when alias names exist.

- Offense date, probation term, conviction code

Parole Officers

- Common names
- CAPS screen
- Similar data facts such as descriptions - date of birth, place of birth, etc.
- TCIC, NCIC fields

Appendix 3.4:

CJIS users were asked: **“Please describe the most common rap sheet errors you have recently encountered.”** Selected responses to the question are as follows:

Municipal Police Departments

- Duplicate record on same person with two different state identification numbers assigned.
- Missing disposition.
- Incomplete conviction information such as where the defendant was convicted and nature of punishment. For cases prior to 1993, CJIS may show a charge without a disposition.
- Conviction status is incomplete or inaccurate.
- No dispositions on arrests.
- Double state identification numbers.
- Wrong arresting agency; same person has more than one state identification number.
- Incomplete conviction and arrest information; incomplete or missing fingerprint information.
- Duplicate numbers
- Incomplete (no dispositions).
- A person will show a conviction but no charges.
- Wrong date of arrest and police department number issued to arrestee.

Sheriff Offices

- Drivers license numbers
- Not obtaining sufficient data at arrest and booking - missing data on Criminal histories . . lack of social security numbers and even drivers license numbers.
- No dispositions from the courts.
- No disposition update.
- Not updated enough.
- Code errors, name/personal history identifiers; failure to sign CR-45.
- State Identification numbers duplicated and agency arrest numbers entered erroneously.
- Out of sequence - example, page two comes up before page one, and page one comes up after page five.
- Date of last date of probation.
- Insufficient information on charge, disposition (sentencing, bonds, etc.) And sometimes date convictions.
- Name, date of birth errors.

District Attorneys

- Old arrests not shown.
- Pages do not come back in order.
- Duplicate numbers: for the same person, DPS and FBI have more than one number assigned to them.
- State Identification number has one too many digits.
- Convictions in relation to an arrest.
- Offender dispositions.
- Wrong arrest information on wrong defendant.
- DWI convictions inaccurate.
- Data as received is not in order.

District and Court Clerks

- We don't receive many forms back. Usually when we do it is because of a recent change on your agencies' part that we were unaware of until we get our forms back.

Parole Officers

- Incorrect name - spelling.
- None noted.
- Arrest but no conviction data; conviction but was never arrested.
- Two different subjects (with common names, not published) with two histories, same name, close descriptors; We have arrested three subjects with same name and description, hard to identify.
- Same name, wrong person.

Appendix 3.5:

CJIS users were asked: "**In your opinion, what causes most errors?**" Selected responses to the question are as follows:

Municipal Police Departments

- Human error (ten answers, or variations thereof).
- Not being able to type information in like on a word processor.

Sheriff Offices

- Human error (twelve answers, or variations thereof).
- Not obtaining sufficient data at arrest and booking.
- People in training or transition.

District Attorneys

- Incomplete data being reported . . . duplicate DPS/FBI numbers for the same person . . . perhaps caused by poor fingerprint cards or reporting.
- Relying on officers to provide correct information.
- Incorrect data entry (six responses).

District and Court Clerks

- Lack of instruction; lack of concern in prosecutor section.

- Clerks rushing through these forms (we submit about 25,000 written forms/year).
- TRN numbers we use, especially old ones, are assigned to someone else in another county.
- Lack of systematic quality control.

Parole Officers

- Reporting (and) entry of arrest in a timely (manner)
- Not enough information entered in the system, i.e., social security number or other important identifiers.
- Human typing errors, incorrect data input

Appendix 3.6:

CJIS users were asked: “**Do you have additional comments?**” Selected responses to the question are as follows:

Municipal Police Departments

- The City of San Antonio contracts with Bexar County to process, fingerprint, and have person arrested by the San Antonio Police Department. The Bexar County Sheriff’s Office is backlogged on submitting this paperwork to this agency in a timely manner.
- I would like to be allowed to transmit CCH information to MDT’s in the field.
- Is there any way to obtain financial aid to go on-line with CJIS for submission purposes?
- Better communication between DPS and agencies for receiving and retrieving information or changed or unknown CJIS offense codes. Also would like to see a final checkpoint within each agency for an accuracy check on CJIS forms prior to sending them to you.
- Police records (receiving) only uses CJIS to get dispositions on arrests.
- We are a small Department with no access to systems. We obtain help from Hunt County Sheriff’s Office in this area.

Sheriff Offices

- With respect to rap sheets, when they print out, they are “mixed” as far as “pages;” also they print out not conforming to letter-sized paper.

District Attorneys

- CJIS does not need to be a substitute for judgment and sentences or contact with parole and probations officers. It’s most helpful on where to go or who to contact.
- We are of the opinion at this time that the CR-43 (input form) is not done uniformly by all contributors

District Clerks and Court Clerks

- We do not receive CR-43 forms in a timely manner.
- Tracking forms are extremely labor intensive. It is a county function for a state agency that is unfunded . . . Very burdensome to three local offices (law enforcement, District Attorney, and Court Clerk).

- We are a new district clerk in office since January 1995. We only have access to our local database.
- This was hard to answer because we are not on any system. The only information we will get is the information that we would send in once we get on our system.

Parole Officers

- Provide funding for update/access to CJIS.
- We have been informed for a long time that we were going to be linked to the CJIS. As of 11/22/95 we still are not on line.
- As stated earlier, I would like to have access to this system to see what information is available to us.
- The CJIS system is desperately needed in the function and mission of this agency, but currently the only access we have is in our central office we need access in all parole offices.
- At this time the parole field officers are not in the CJIS System, but I think it would make our job easier if we had more access to information regarding the releasee's criminal history. The information can help us especially if the releasee is committing criminal offenses in other cities or counties. If possible I would like to have the CJIS attached to the CICS system to temporarily to see if it would benefit the field offices of the parole division.

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