OHIO
CRIMINAL SENTENCING COMMISSION

THE OHIO SENTENCING DATA PLATFORM
GOALS AND USES

The Ohio Sentencing Data Platform (OSDP) is designed to help judges implement the Uniform Sentencing and Method of Conviction forms and to empower courts with accessible and reliable information. The OSDP will achieve goals that include: using data to inform decision-making; improving transparency; and, making data accessible for the public, practitioners, and research.

USING DATA TO INFORM DECISION-MAKING

Providing accessible, searchable information about criminal sentencing will allow for data-informed decisions.

Data-informed decisions and policy (also called evidence-based) are achieved by using information and data to clearly identify successes and challenges. Using data to inform decisions allows successes to be replicated and provides solutions designed to meet challenges, thereby improving results. The data can also be used by policy makers to make sensible, cost-effective decisions, promote smart, effective use of resources, and ensure measured, proportional responses. Further, reliance on data creates opportunity to monitor and evaluate results, determine if the desired effects are achieved, and assess unintended consequences.

Giving justice-system practitioners, including judges, attorneys, and court staff the best information available for use during the sentencing process without administrative or fiscal burden, allows them to perform their public-service duties in the most impactful way.

The collection of sentencing data in a comprehensive and searchable database will inform decision-making and give judges the tools and information needed to impose sentences in accordance with the purposes and principles of felony sentencing. Further, it is a necessary and substantial step toward a more understandable, transparent, and fair criminal justice system. The existence of sentencing information is useful to all practitioners. For example, prosecutors may use the data to help inform sentencing recommendations and defense counsel can, in turn, also use data to compare sentencing recommendations among similarly situated offenders.

IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY

Improving transparency of the justice system and sentencing increases public confidence and trust.

Public trust and confidence are key in the administration of justice. While in public opinion surveys, courts and judges tend to have higher levels of trust than other public institutions and officials, these levels have diminished in recent years. From 2018 to 2019, there was an 11-percent decrease in respondents who expressed confidence in state courts. Moreover, less than one-half of respondents (49 percent) agreed that courts provided equal justice to all.[1]

Research shows that most Americans are unfamiliar with court processes and sentencing practices, but increased transparency can empower the public to better understand the criminal justice system.

MAKING DATA ACCESSIBLE FOR THE PUBLIC, PRACTITIONERS, AND RESEARCH

The sentencing data collected can be used to answer a number of basic questions that are currently unable to be answered and can inform criminal justice policy and research.[2]

As evidenced by decades of reports and recommendations, there is a perpetual desire for better sentencing data on patterns, trends, disparity, and proportionality. The development of a sentencing database will enable the compilation and organization of an abundance of information already collected in disconnected files and systems.

The OSDP presents the best chance to reflect the reality unfolding in courtrooms across Ohio and to help those involved in the criminal justice system. Sentencing data provides an opportunity for robust research, including comparisons of counties to demonstrate that community standards can drive law enforcement, prosecution, and sentencing decision-making.

ACCESS TO OSDP

Those who will access the system will be in one of two primary groups: data creators and data viewers.

Data Creators: Of the two groups, the creators are by far the smaller group. Creators, comprised of Ohio trial court judges and their staff generate data for the viewers. They populate the OSDP with information from sentencing entries, method of conviction entries, and supplemental biographical information from other existing sources. The process by which this information is entered into the OSDP will likely vary by court and by judge. There will be specific credentials for data creators and they will be the only ones allowed to enter or edit the data that goes into the OSDP.

An advantage for data creators is that while they are "creating" the data for the OSDP, they are concurrently filling out the information for their sentencing entry, making the process more streamlined and efficient. When the information is in the entry, it's in the system (and vice versa), eliminating the need for extra steps or effort on the part of the judge or court staff.

Data Viewers: This group is much larger and more amorphous. The data-viewer group may include, but is not limited to judges, court staff, attorneys, employees of other state agencies, academics, the media, and the general public. This group will be able to view and access the data entered into the system by the data creators.

WHAT OSDP IS *NOT* DESIGNED TO DO

While OSDP represents an enormous step forward in the use and collection of data in Ohio's criminal justice system, it is not a panacea. OSDP is explicitly designed *not* to replace the Ohio Courts Network, individual court case management systems, or to diminish judicial discretion.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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ENDNOTES

1   National Center for State Courts. "State of the State Courts—Survey Analysis, 2019." Jan. 3, 2020.

2   In Ohio, basic questions about adults sentenced for felony offenses cannot currently be answered:

- What sentence was imposed for each felony offender?
- How many people were sentenced to a specific felony offense in a year and at what level?
- How many people are in or were placed in diversion programs?
- How many people are on or were placed on court-ordered community control?
- How many people were found not guilty (weren't sentenced)?
- How many sentences are imposed as a result of a plea bargain?