Using Data to Improve Public Safety and Criminal Justice Outcomes Proposal Addendum

The General Assembly created the Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission and it's Advisory Committee in Ohio Revised Code §181.21 through 181.26 to, among other things, study Ohio's criminal laws, sentencing patterns, and juvenile offender dispositions and recommend comprehensive plans to the General Assembly that encourage public safety, proportionality, uniformity, certainty, judicial discretion, deterrence, fairness, simplification, more sentencing options, victims' rights, and other reasonable goals.

The Commission began meeting in 1991 and is the only long-standing state agency designed, by statute, to bring judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys together with members of the General Assembly, state and local officials, victims, and law enforcement officers.  The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Ohio chairs the 31 member Commission and appoints 10 members: one appellate judge; 3 municipal or county judges; 3 juvenile court judges; and 3 other common pleas judges. The Governor appoints 12 members: a county, juvenile, and municipal prosecutor; 2 defense attorneys; a Bar Association representative; a sheriff; 2 police chiefs; a crime victim; a county commissioner; and a mayor. Four members of the General Assembly serve on the Commission, one from each caucus. The State Public Defender, the Director of Rehabilitation and Correction, the Director of Youth Services, and the Superintendent of the Highway Patrol are also members of the Commission.

Recently, the Criminal Sentencing Commission established its vision statement to enhance justice and its mission statement to ensure fair sentencing in the State of Ohio.  To fulfill its vision, the Criminal Sentencing Commission will develop and recommend sentencing policy to the General Assembly that is designed to:

Advance public safety
Realize fairness in sentencing
Preserve meaningful judicial discretion
Distinguish the most efficient and effective use of correctional resources
Provide a meaningful array of sentencing options

The Criminal Sentencing Commission will achieve its mission by:

Analyzing current adult and juvenile criminal statutes and law in Ohio and other states
Studying sentencing patterns and outcomes and balancing the needs of criminal   sentencing and available correctional resources
Researching and recommending evidence based approaches to reducing recidivism
Recommending reasonable and specific criminal justice reforms

Consistent with those core values and because the Criminal Sentencing Commission is the only state agency that routinely brings together judges, prosecuting and defense attorneys, corrections officials, law enforcement, victims' advocates, behavioral health professionals, academics, community corrections experts, and others with a direct interest in criminal sentencing, the Criminal Sentencing Commission is uniquely positioned to bridge the information gap among criminal justice system partners, provide an ongoing forum to debate policy initiatives

and suggest comprehensive changes that affect prison and jail populations and serve the citizens of the great State of Ohio.

The proposal, Using Data to Improve Public Safety and Criminal Justice Outcomes, recognizes that criminal justice indicators are wide-ranging and complex.  Determining if, where and to what extent, criminal justice data indicators are available, accessible and consumable in our state and then seeking viable ways to catalog and analyze that information will provide a platform to recommend legislative and policy strategies to improve outcomes for Ohio's citizens by creating safer, fairer, and a more cost-efficient use of resources in our criminal justice system.

Therefore, the University of Cincinnati will create a comprehensive new system to capture information beyond traditional criminal justice indicators, now housed in siloes, that has statewide application and will advance evidence based practices across the entire criminal justice system. In addition, the project will create benchmarks for both existing and new practices, that is not otherwise available through existing research, and provide data for researchers to develop additional best practices in a variety of criminal justice subject areas.

States that have made successful strides toward implementing criminal justice and public safety reform, including robust information sharing, have commonality in that they bring together criminal justice leaders into a group with statewide representation and influence to begin analysis. The process of creating such a group follows well-known criminal justice research and literature practice which consistently illustrates the best way to make criminal justice reforms, is to follow a systems approach. A systems approach appreciates the varied, diverse criminal justice professional landscape and the interplay of the branches of government, while autonomous, nonetheless comingle with one another in indisputable ways such that initiatives of one agency or group can affect others within criminal justice system. The Commission by its very nature spans all three branches of government and is inclusive of criminal justice, public safety professionals which allows unprecedented access to data, information and the opportunity to develop data sets and propose meaningful, creative, real-world, reason-based and person-centered criminal justice reform recommendations.

To do this, the Sentencing Commission will work with three pilot counties to align resources, facilitate data collection efforts by the University of Cincinnati and ultimately use the findings to generate comprehensive recommendations for statewide application/data sharing, changes to (or maintaining current) policies, practices and statutes and to provide a qualitative look at how best to advance data driven, evidence based criminal justice decision making in Ohio. The Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission is well positioned to lead and advance this effort because since its inception, it has provided an impartial and consensus-driven platform for the analysis and development of policies and practices that maximize public safety, reduce recidivism and equalize justice.