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**Recommendations for Information System
Planning and Development in the
Cuyahoga County, Ohio Court of Common Pleas
and Related Departments**

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE REPORT



Bureau of Justice Assistance

CRIMINAL COURTS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT

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Technical Assistance Assignment No. 100

**Recommendations for Information System
Planning and Development in the
Cuyahoga County, Ohio Court of Common Pleas
and Related Departments**

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Consultant

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ASSIGNMENT DATA SHEET

Technical Assistance No.: 100
Requesting Jurisdiction: Cuyahoga County, Ohio
Requesting Agency: Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas
Probation Department
Requesting Official: Joseph A. Janesz, Chief Probation Officer
Dates of On-Site Study: November 17, 1987
Consultant Assigned: Thomas Lane
Central Focus of Study: Information System Development

This report was prepared in conjunction with the EMT Adjudication Technical Assistance Project, under a Cooperative Agreement with the Bureau of Justice Assistance of the U.S. Department of Justice.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In August 1987, Joseph A. Janesz, Chief Probation Officer for Cuyahoga County (Cleveland), Ohio, requested the assistance of BJA's Adjudication Technical Assistance Project (ATAP) at the EMT Group, Inc. to evaluate the Department's management information system as well as the judicial information system of the Court of Common Pleas. The need for this evaluation was concurred with by Presiding Judge Leo M. Spellacy.

In addition to an overall evaluation, several specific issues were identified by Mr. Janesz:

(1) Tracking Cases From Referral to Completion.

The Department prepares approximately 450 Presentence Reports monthly and, of these, one-third are for individuals who are confined to the County Jail. The jail is presently overcrowded and much emphasis is placed on tracking cases from referral to completion.

(2) Flagging Probation Violators.

The Department was presently implementing within the MIS System the ability to flag individuals who were placed on probation and subsequently taken into jail custody as probation violators. Despite several manual systems implemented to detect these probationers when they are arrested, some delays have occurred in notifying the probation officer of an arrest.

(3) Tracking Probationers Awaiting Placement in Treatment Centers.

Some probationers are temporarily housed in the County Jail awaiting placement in treatment centers. The wait can be two months or more and these individuals must be tracked manually during this time.

In an effort to define specifically the nature and level of effort required to respond to this request, the ATAP assigned Thomas Lane, a court systems analyst, to conduct a problem definition visit to Cuyahoga County. On November 17, 1987, Mr. Lane conducted a site visit to Cuyahoga County at which time he met with the following individuals:

Chief Judge Leo Spellacy
John Curran, Court Administrator
Joseph Janmesz, Chief Probation Officer
Herb Terry, Probation Supervisor
Ed Kollin, Court Program Coordinator
Ron Ball, Director, JIS
Dick Baker, Senior Analyst, JIS
Sue Bennis, Senior Analyst, SIS

Systems documentation on JIS, PMIS and SIS was reviewed along with miscellaneous materials on the Community Based Corrections reporting and Probation intake and weighted caseload systems.

II. PRINCIPLE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Focus of the Study

As noted above, the principal purpose of this technical assistance study was to determine the tasks necessary to perform a preliminary evaluation of the Probation Department's management information system (PMIS) and the Courts Judicial Information System (JIS) which is a part. One specific issue of concern was the inability of the Probation Department to be informed when a probationer was arrested, despite the belief that this information was in the Sheriff's Information System (SIS).

The organizations and their supporting information systems are large and complex so the scope of the preliminary evaluation must be limited. Likewise, the focus of this study was from the perspective of the Probation Department as a user of data processing interested in increasing productivity and as one department within the larger court system which must compete for scarce resources.

B. Specific Problems Identified

Specific problems identified during the technical assistance visit in addition to the lack of data exchange between the court's and sheriff's automated information systems were:

- o the ages of JIS and PMIS systems and their capabilities to keep pace with changes in the court and Probation offices.
- o the use of office automation by the Probation Department.
 - extent of wordprocessing for presentence reports.
 - accounting for restitution and other payments.
- o the potential for greater use of existing automation.
 - by giving satellite offices access (i.e., terminals and printers) to PMIS.
 - enhancing the weighted caseload system to accommodate the 15 probation officers on special programs.
 - discontinuing use of cards and other manual records where the same information is stored in the PMIS data base.

C. General Suggestions for Further Information Systems Planning.

Several factors dominate any consideration of potential solutions to the above mentioned problem areas and indicate that an information systems master plan for the court, following a needs analysis and evaluation of existing automation resources, needs to be developed. Three pertinent factors are:

1. The age of existing automation - the JIS documentation was developed in 1974, almost three lifetimes ago for systems technology. This is not to imply that JIS is not serving the needs of its users or has been adequately maintained. It is meant to imply that the underlying software may be nearing the end of its useful life (for IBM) and will need to be entirely rewritten.

If a complete rewrite, and hence redesign of JIS will take place in the next year or two, then some of the "band-aid" solutions described below are best deferred and incorporated into the new design.

The age(s) of existing automated systems also indicate that even if the underlying software (IMS) has a comfortable, foreseeable future, it may be more cost effective to develop a new system to meet the expanded requirements of the court and Probation than to attempt additional enhancements to the current JIS. For example, it seems that greater emphasis is being placed upon journal entries than was originally envisioned. This trend is likely to continue with Community Based Corrections reporting and the constant demand for statistics from Probation. Another indication of the aging in design is the inability to uniquely identify a defendant. As a solution the court is interested in using defendant information from the SIS (Sheriff) and matching Court case and charge information to it in JIS. This is one solution to the problem of identifying rearrested probationers that the Court's MIS department is considering which would be a major departure from the present design wherein the court maintains its own case and defendant information.

2. The role of county data processing in approving and furnishing all automated information support (including PCs): this monopolistic role of the county in furnishing information support to the courts and probation suggests the need for thorough long range planning by the court to ensure its continued support as well as participation and a watchful eye on the long range plans of county data processing.

There are obvious benefits to a centralized source for information support:

- o interaction between the systems of the various agencies should be easier because of commonality of hardware and software. Planning and common data linkages are still required.
- o the court and other agencies need not maintain programming staffs nor be burdened with maintenance of hardware and communications.

3. The extensive use of and considerable resources spent on automation suggest periodic, objective evaluations. Evaluation of existing systems should address not only the technical aspects of automation furnished by the county, but also a cost and benefit review. Such a review would address productivity improvement reading to, for example, discontinuation of intake cards and expansion of the weighted caseload system to meet its original objectives access to PMIS by satellite offices, where 50% of the caseload resides, and expansion to include restitution and other payments (which have grown over the years to a half million dollars collected annually with only 25% of defendants meeting their court-ordered obligations) would also have received periodic attention for consideration when annual budgets were reviewed.

It is therefore recommended that an Information Systems Master Plan be developed to address the office automation and data processing needs of the court and Probation, as a major department competing for limited resources. At a minimum, the Plan should encompass:

- o evaluations of existing systems;
- o potential for office automation and data processing for next five years;
- o relationship between systems both:
 - within the court (JIS, PMIS, etc.) and,
 - among other agencies (SIS, CJIS, etc.)
- o system goals and priorities
- o resources and responsibilities
- o a timetable for system development and implementation with milestones.

Obviously development of a Master Plan will require considerable input, and review from managers of the court, probation, county data processing and others. The Plan must also fit into any larger plans of the court and county.

D. Shorter Run Considerations

1. The ubiquitous PC is markedly absent form the Probation Offices. It has potential for improving the productivity of probation supervisors, officers and support staff given proper planning, installation and training. Communicating

PCs can increase the utility of PMIS information by making it accessible for presentence reports and restitution accounting. Packaged software for accounting and other applications exists which is as powerful as main frame systems for the single user environment. Familiarity with systems, gained through the use of PCs, encourages more robust user-participation in the development of larger data processing systems leveraging the work of systems analysts and programmers.

A position should be immediately considered for an office automation specialist/data processing coordinator within Probation, to begin the process of introducing the department to potential productivity improvements. To avoid the use of PCs as status symbols, priority should be given to potential productivity improvements. The OA specialist could be placed under the technical supervision of the court's MIS department and instructed to represent the interests of Probation in data processing applications as well.

2. The Sheriff's office captures and maintains the last release decision for defendants. Even though a defendant may have multiple cases, there will be but one release decision. Likewise, a positive ID is made within 24 hours and a SO# assigned/reapplied. The BCI # may also be present. Assuming the last release decision is accurately recorded (and Probation may be able to help with this), it is possible for the Sheriff to notify Probation of Probationers who have been rearrested.
3. The court's MIS staff is capable of drafting a request for Proposal (RFP) and the technical evaluation of proposals received in response. The level of effort required to draft the RFP must be in proportion to the task of developing the Master Plan itself.