

May 1, 2017

The Honorable Jefferson B. Sessions
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Sessions,

Congratulations on your appointment and confirmation to head the United States Department of Justice (DOJ). We write regarding the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), a unit within the Office of Justice Programs (OJP). BJS is vital to DOJ because of its mission to “collect, process, analyze, and disseminate accurate and timely information on crime and the administration of justice and to assist States and localities to improve criminal justice record-keeping.”

BJS data provide a strong foundation for DOJ policy and administration. Over the last several years, the DOJ has strengthened institutional arrangements that protect BJS autonomy, help the agency fend off unwarranted influence, and ensure BJS has the last word in the collection and dissemination of criminal and juvenile justice statistics. We applaud these developments and urge they be continued.

With OJP due for reauthorization, we ask that two provisions be included to complement these institutional arrangements and further bolster BJS autonomy. Specifically, we urge Senate confirmation for the BJS director—removed in 2012—be restored and that the director’s status be changed from serving at the will of the president to serving a fixed term of at least four years, staggered from the presidential election.

It is imperative that policy discussions about the often-contentious issues regarding crime and justice be informed by statistical data trusted by the public to be objective, valid, and reliable. As a 2015 letter signed by 20 former statistical agency heads states, “All sides of a policy debate should be able to look to the statistical data as objective and high quality. Any perception that the data have been influenced by a partisan perspective undermines the policy making and its administration.”

To ensure BJS data are viewed as objective and of highest quality, BJS must be seen as an independent statistical agency wherein data collection, analysis, and dissemination are under the sole control of the BJS. A statistical agency’s independence is greatly aided by presidential appointment and Senate confirmation because of the vetting and prestige it provides. The combination of the two—presidential appointment and Senate confirmation (PASC)—is especially important for establishing the director as independent and fully qualified. The fixed and staggered term further ensures both independence and a fully qualified director—because of the possibility of serving different administrations. In addition, the PASC process ensures the director will have a stronger voice within DOJ and OJP to articulate budget and human resource needs to protect the long-term requirements of statistical series and the infrastructure underpinning the more than 60 national statistical programs on crime and justice for which data must be collected from several thousand state, local, and tribal agencies, offices, and institutions.

The strength and autonomy of a federal statistical agency for which we advocate are in accordance with the National Academy of Sciences' *Principles and Practices for a Federal Statistical Agency*—the fourth and fifth editions of which have been endorsed by the ASA Board of Directors—and new guidance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) directive for federal statistical agencies (www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-02/pdf/2014-28326.pdf), as well as the Department of Justice's Scientific and Research Integrity Policy. Indeed, we understand DOJ was due to send OMB a report on its implementation of this new guidance. We hope you will review this report.

The American Statistical Association—the oldest scientific professional society in the United States—has 19,000 members in government, industry, and academia. The ASA has a proud tradition of service to statisticians, quantitative scientists, and users of statistics across a wealth of academic areas and applications. Among our many committees is the Committee on Law and Justice Statistics, which is devoted to BJS issues.

In short, we support statutory language explicitly confirming the independence of the bureau's leadership and restoring the Senate confirmation of the BJS director for a fixed term staggered from the presidential cycle. This provides periodic infusion of fresh eyes and new thinking on the ever-changing nature of crime and justice in the United States, while simultaneously insulating the agency from political pressure or interference.

Thank you for your consideration. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss our recommendation or otherwise provide additional information.

Sincerely,



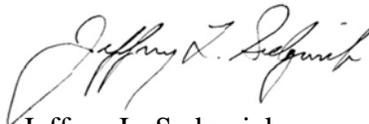
Lawrence Greenfeld
Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001-
2005



William Sabol
Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015-
2016



James Lynch
Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2010-
2012



Jeffrey L. Sedgwick
Director, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2006-
2008



Barry D. Nussbaum
President, American Statistical Association

Cc: Alan Hanson, Acting Assistant Attorney General, Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs

NB: A similar letter was sent to the chairs and ranking members of the House and Senate judiciary committees.