



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

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GENERAL GOVERNMENT  
DIVISION

B-210890

MARCH 25, 1983

The Honorable William French Smith  
The Attorney General



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Dear Mr. Attorney General:

Subject: Department of Justice Case Management  
Information System Does Not Meet  
Departmental or Congressional  
Information Needs (GAO/GGD-83-50)

This report presents the results of our review of the development and use of the Department of Justice's case management information system. The system, developed by the Justice Information Systems Center, has cost over \$100,000 to develop and operate. Although it was intended that the system would meet departmental and congressional information needs, these needs were not properly defined before developing the system. Consequently, the system was not designed to meet the needs of its intended users. As a result, the system has not produced any reports for departmental or congressional users, and none of the intended users have requested information from the system even though it has been operating for over a year.

Our review indicates that the system is of little use to the Congress or the Department because it contains limited information on only a portion of the Department's overall workload and that information is not complete and accurate. Rigorous data management, as part of the Department's information resources management program, is needed to produce uniform and reliable information on the Department's workload.

In fiscal year 1983, the Department plans to spend \$129,000 to operate the system and to make some unspecified enhancements. Because the system has not been used by any of its intended users, we believe the Department should identify and provide for specific departmental and congressional case management and workload information needs before it spends any additional funds to enhance the system.

This audit was performed in accordance with generally accepted Government auditing standards. We conducted our work

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primarily at the Justice Management Division (JMD), the litigating divisions (Antitrust, Civil, Civil Rights, Criminal, Lands and Natural Resources, and Tax), and the Executive Office of the United States Attorneys (EOUSA). To evaluate the development and implementation of the Department's case management system, we (1) reviewed the policies, procedures, plans, congressional hearings reports, authorization bills, and other correspondence which related to developing the system; (2) examined the system's documentation to compare the data collected by the system with that desired by the Congress; (3) reviewed departmental reports on the operation of the system; (4) interviewed departmental officials and personnel responsible for the development and operation of case management systems at each of the above organizations; and (5) analyzed a departmental printout of data on 50 cases from each organization submitting information to the system's data base to confirm the existence of problems identified in previous departmental studies.

#### BACKGROUND

Over the past few years, the litigating divisions and EOUSA have worked to develop computer-based, case management information systems. In 1979, the Senate Committee on the Judiciary expressed its concern over the absence of accurate and easily retrievable information on the Department's workload and operations. The committee required the Department to prepare a plan for the development and implementation of compatible, comprehensive case management systems to improve the quality of management information. The Department submitted its plan to the committee in April 1980.

In July 1980, the Department created the Justice Information Systems Center (JISC) and assigned it the responsibility for (1) overseeing and coordinating implementation of the plan submitted to the committee and (2) developing and implementing a departmental case management system. A system was developed and became operational in October 1981. Through fiscal year 1982, the Department spent approximately \$110,000<sup>1/</sup> on the system of which \$69,000 was for development and \$41,000 for operation and maintenance. The fiscal year 1983 budget includes \$129,000<sup>1/</sup> to operate the system and to make unspecified enhancements.

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<sup>1/</sup>These amounts are based on a Litigation Systems Staff estimate of the time personnel have worked or plan to work on the system and the cost of computer and computer-related services. Personnel costs were developed using direct salary costs and the Department's fringe benefit costs.

DEPARTMENTAL CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM DOES NOT MEET DEPARTMENTAL OR CONGRESSIONAL INFORMATION NEEDS

The Department's case management information system does not meet departmental management or congressional information needs. Because the system was not designed to meet their needs, it has yet to produce any reports for departmental managers or for the Congress. In addition, as currently designed, the system can provide only a portion of the case management and workload information requested by the Congress. This limited information is not reliable because it is not being properly updated.

System was not designed to meet users' specific information needs

Although the Department's case management information system has been operating since October 1981, it has not produced any reports for departmental management use because the needs of departmental users were not fully defined. Department officials told us that users and users' information needs were never clearly identified prior to developing and implementing the case management information system. Department personnel responsible for the original development effort said that only a limited, informal user requirements analysis was made before they developed the system. The former Director of JISC said the requirements analysis was made during committee meetings with representatives from JISC, litigating divisions, and EOUSA. According to Department officials, the informal requirements analysis identified only pieces of data which the representatives believed were needed and could be provided by the litigating divisions and EOUSA. Department officials agreed that the analysis did not identify departmental users or their specific needs, how the identified pieces of data related to the users' needs, or the reports to be produced by the system.

Because the system was not designed to meet users' needs, it is not used by anyone. A Litigation Systems Staff official told us that there are no plans to produce periodic reports for any users. Also, potential departmental users have not requested that the system produce any reports for their use.

System provides only a portion of stated congressional information needs

The Department's case management information system is capable of meeting only a portion of the congressional information needs which were identified in the fiscal year 1980 Appropriation Authorization Act and in various reports of the Senate

Committee on the Judiciary. The committee wanted information on the Department's overall workload as well as specific information on individual filed cases and investigations. The committee expected that this information would be useful to the Department in planning and managing its programs and resources and to the Congress in fulfilling its legislative and oversight responsibilities.

Because the departmental system was not designed to meet stated congressional information needs, it does not provide information on investigations and other work that is not directly related to filed cases such as decisions to prosecute, litigate, and plea bargain. Also, the system does not provide information on the Department's overall workload. The system contains only about half of the approximately 23 types of data that the Senate Committee on the Judiciary said it needed. Some of the more significant data elements which the system neither captures nor reports are Attorney General priority, declination reasons, outcome or disposition at termination, and stage of proceeding at declination.

The workload information not captured by the system is significant. For example, Tax Division personnel told us that only 50 percent of the Division's workload involves filed cases. Similarly, Antitrust Division personnel said that only 25 to 30 percent of the Division's workload involves filed cases.

System's data base is not reliable

Because the case management information system's data base has not been properly updated, it does not contain complete or accurate data on the Department's filed cases. As a result, the system's data base does not provide reliable information.

Most organizations responsible for submitting data on filed cases to the departmental system have not been submitting complete information. On the basis of our analysis of a Department printout of 50 cases submitted from each organization, we found that many of the required pieces of data were missing. For example, many case records that we examined did not contain court docket numbers, case opening dates, or court types. In addition, one litigating organization, the Lands and Natural Resources Division, has yet to submit any data to the system because of difficulties in extracting the data from its own data base. These problems were also found in an April 1982 Justice Management Division report on the departmental system.

In addition to omissions of data, some organizations have submitted inaccurate data for inclusion in the departmental system. For example, according to the April 1982 Justice Management Division report, the Tax Division submitted data which showed "case open dates" which were later than the "closing dates"; the Civil Division submitted data with codes that were invalid or unknown; and the EOUSA had not submitted the full court docket number for some cases.

DEPARTMENTAL DATA MANAGEMENT PROGRAM  
NEEDED TO PROVIDE UNIFORM AND COMPLETE  
DATA FOR THE CONGRESS

Until the Department establishes a data management program, as part of its information resources management activities, the efforts to collect and aggregate uniform and reliable information for departmental managers and the Congress will not be successful. The Department has not established standard data elements (pieces or units of information, e.g. date, name, address, etc.), codes, and descriptions for the key data required by the Congress such as case type, program type, disposition, decisions and reasons not to prosecute or litigate, nature of decision (settlement, plea bargain, etc.), stage of proceedings, and cases referred by or to the Department. Effective data management is essential to provide uniform, accurate, and complete case management information.

Data elements, codes, and descriptions for key case management information have not been standardized within the Department. For example, two divisions use three digit numeric codes for the data element denoting "court type." However, they assign different numeric codes for the same information. Another division uses a two character alphanumeric code to denote court type. The use of different coding schemes has required the Department to convert the data prior to entering it into the departmental system. Also, some divisions use different descriptions for the same type of case information. For example, one division uses "program-category" codes and another division uses "case-type" codes to identify the same type of case information.

Because the litigating divisions and the EOUSA have each established their own data elements, codes, and descriptions, the Department has not been able to provide the information the

Congress requested. For example, the Department has not been able to collect and aggregate information requested by the Senate Committee on the Judiciary in its report on the Department's Authorization Act of fiscal year 1981, such as

"\* \* \* (a) matters and cases, by case-type and program-type, from intake or commencement of the investigation to the final disposition, including judgments and collection of fines; (b) decisions whether to prosecute or litigate, whether to settle a case, and whether to plea bargain, the stage of the proceeding at which such decision is made and the reasons for such decision, again by case-type and program-type; (c) the number of matters and cases handled by each division or office primarily responsible for the matter or case, and by each supporting division or office responsible for assisting in such matter or case, again, by case-type and program-type; \* \* \*."

Although this information, and more, has been requested by the Congress for several years, it has yet to be provided. It is unlikely that this information can be provided unless the Department establishes a data management program as the foundation of the departmental case management information system. Such a program should specify standard data elements and codes and establish standard descriptions and definitions for them.

TASK GROUP FAULTS SYSTEM  
AND PROPOSES IMPROVEMENTS

The Task Group On Automated Legal Support Systems, comprised of top level departmental and divisional officials, was formed to assess the adequacy of management information systems operating in the Department. The Task Group recently found the departmental case management information systems to be inadequate and proposed several improvements. In its October 6, 1982, draft report, the Task Group cited many of the same problems we discuss in our report. The Task Group's report also contained several proposed objectives to improve and expand the collection of departmental case management information. On January 25, 1983, the proposed objectives for improved case management information were approved by the Deputy Attorney General. These objectives include providing the following information on the Department's total workload (filed cases, investigations, and other matters):

--Accurate aggregate counts.

- Summary resource utilization information.
- Stage of proceeding information for priority work.
- Accurate accounting for accounts receivable.

In addition, the objectives include providing summary information on implementation of departmental priorities, summary projections of resource requirements, and operational information to supervisory personnel.

Department officials told us that it appears likely the Department will take action to significantly improve departmental case management information. The Task Group Chairman also stated that the Task Group will probably direct the efforts to identify departmental users' specific needs so that the objectives for improved case management information can be achieved.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The Department of Justice spent about \$110,000 on its case management information system which does not meet the information needs of the Department or the Congress. The system has been operational since October 1981, but it has not produced any reports for either departmental management or congressional use. As currently designed, the system is capable of providing only a portion of the stated congressional information needs. In addition, the system's data base is not reliable because it has not been properly updated with complete and accurate information. These problems have been aggravated by the lack of a departmental data management program, as part of its information resources management program, to standardize data elements, codes, and definitions.

The Department plans to spend \$129,000 in fiscal year 1983 to operate the system and to make unspecified enhancements; however, we believe it should not spend any of these funds to enhance the existing system until the information needs of departmental and congressional users are fully identified and the system is redesigned to meet them.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that you:

- Not authorize any additional funds to modify or enhance the existing departmental case management information

system until departmental and congressional information needs have been fully identified and a plan developed and approved to redesign the system to provide the needed information.

- Establish a rigorous data management program, as part of the Department's information resources management program, to standardize and control data elements, definitions, and codes so that uniform, accurate, and complete case management information can be provided to Department managers and the Congress.
- Continue the involvement of top-level management through the Task Group On Automated Legal Support Systems to encourage the active participation of all levels of the organization in meeting departmental and congressional case management and workload information needs.

#### AGENCY COMMENTS

On February 17, 1983, we met with the Assistant Attorney General for Administration and the Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Justice Management Division to obtain their comments on our report. The officials fully agreed with our description of the problems with the departmental case management system. They also concurred with our conclusions and recommendations.

In commenting on the report, the Assistant Attorney General for Administration said that our recommendations would be beneficial to the Department in its current efforts to obtain more complete and accurate case management information.

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As you know, 31 U.S.C. §720 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the House Committee on Government Operations and the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the report.



We are sending copies of this report to the Chairmen, Senate and House Committees on Appropriations, Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs, House Committee on Government Operations, and Senate and House Committees on the Judiciary, and the Director, Office of Management and Budget.

Sincerely yours,

*W. J. Anderson*

William J. Anderson  
Director