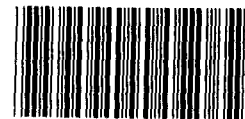


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STATEMENT OF
ARNOLD P. JONES, SENIOR ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR
GENERAL GOVERNMENT DIVISION
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION, JUSTICE, AND AGRICULTURE
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
ON
REGIONAL INFORMATION SHARING SYSTEMS



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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

We are pleased to be a part of your hearings this morning. As requested, our testimony today is focused on a report we issued in November 1984 titled Regional Information Sharing Systems (RISS). In that report we reviewed three of the seven RISS projects to determine if Justice Department audit recommendations for financial management improvements had been made. We also addressed the extent and value of various services the projects provide to their member agencies.

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RISS projects' operations and funding

Before we discuss the details of our report, we would like to describe the conditions which led to the establishment of the RISS projects. Local law enforcement agencies contended that they had to deal with sophisticated operations of criminal organizations which transcended local jurisdictional boundaries. In such situations, the ability of a single state or local agency to effect successful apprehensions was limited.

To cope with this problem, local law enforcement agencies saw the need to group together and collectively upgrade their investigative and information gathering efforts. By working together, state and local agencies hoped to better coordinate the collection, analysis and dissemination of intelligence information as well as support investigative activity with supplemental funding and equipment.

As you are aware, the RISS projects, each administered by a board of directors composed of member state representatives,

have evolved into a unique network of systems which provide their state and local member agencies in all 50 states with centralized information and analyses on suspect organizations and individuals operating in a multistate region. In addition, the projects provide optional services, including investigative support, specialized equipment, training, telecommunications, and technical assistance. However, funding and managing these projects has become a concern to the Congress and the Department of Justice.

The RISS projects depend entirely on the federal government for funds, and while the Congress has had seemingly little problem with funding, the executive branch has been less than enthusiastic about applying the funds. In addition to questioning the appropriateness of federal funding, one of the major concerns cited by the executive branch is the question of local management of the projects. This concern was highlighted by a series of Department of Justice, Justice Management Division audit reports published in 1982 and 1983 which evaluated each RISS project's operations and made a series of recommended actions to correct observed weaknesses.

Improved project management

The three RISS projects we reviewed in our report were the Regional Organized Crime Information Center (ROCIC) in Nashville, Tennessee; the Rocky Mountain Information Network (RMIN) in Albuquerque, New Mexico; and the Western States Information Network (WSIN) in Sacramento, California. We visited the

projects between February and June 1984 and focused on project activities during calendar year 1983.

We found that the three RISS projects have implemented the management improvements recommended in the Department of Justice audits by adopting new fiscal and administrative systems restricting the scope of project activities. Many of the problems identified in the audit reports have also been addressed by Department of Justice program guidelines issued in March 1983. We found that the three projects we reviewed generally comply with those guidelines. The Justice Department has continued to refine the guidelines and has placed increased emphasis on regular monitoring of RISS project management.

Examples of the types of fiscal and administrative management controls which have been taken or are being implemented include a more detailed review of reimbursed personnel costs by WSIN; development by RMIN of a financial management manual to supplement the grantee's accounting system; and better documentation and control of travel reimbursements by ROCIC. In addition, the Justice Department auditors recommended two specific restrictions on the types of activities which RISS projects should conduct. These restrictions--prohibiting project staff from participating in investigations or carrying firearms and implementing strict internal controls over funds used to purchase information or evidence--have been incorporated into the policies and procedures followed by each of the three projects we reviewed.

The publishing of federal guidelines and the monitoring of their implementation has standardized the management of the RISS projects. Since each project evolved independently and no specific legislative guidance existed, there has been uncertainty within the Justice Department and among RISS projects about the criteria by which projects should be judged. However, with the publishing of national guidelines in March 1983, this uncertainty has been alleviated. The projects we reviewed have adopted policies and procedures that comply with or exceed these national guidelines.

In addition to formal guidelines, the Justice Department's Intelligence Systems and Policy Review Board and the Office of Justice Assistance, Research, and Statistics (OJARS) play major oversight roles in monitoring the RISS project. Both the Board and the OJARS staff have visited each RISS project and provide continuing monitoring of project activities.

Optional project services

In addition to their primary objective of information sharing, the RISS projects provide a number of technical and financial services to member organizations. These optional services are data analysis, investigative support, specialized equipment, training, telecommunications, and technical assistance.

The three RISS projects we reviewed have varying patterns of service utilization. For the most part, the optional services appear to be secondary to the conduct of the information system. Member agencies generally use the information system

more than they use optional services, and each optional service usually costs less to provide than the information system. When the value of optional services is assessed in terms of input to the information system, it appears that users of these services input more to the data base than do nonusers. The three projects we reviewed are following federal guidelines in providing services to members and in obtaining follow-up information from optional service users.

We were unable to develop a clear measure of the value of optional services. Federal guidelines state that optional services are to be "designed to support the required information-sharing component." To evaluate the level of information system input by users of optional services, we compared the input of users and nonusers. In RMIN and WSIN, a higher percentage of agencies that used at least one optional service contributed to the information system compared to those agencies that did not use these services. For example, we found that 69 percent of WSIN members that used any optional service during 1983 placed information in their network's data base while only 24 percent of WSIN members who used no optional services contributed information. In ROCIC, nearly all members used at least one service--the telecommunications network. However, if this service is omitted, 62 percent of those member agencies who used no other service submitted information compared to 81 percent that used at least one other service.

Office of Justice Assistance and RISS project officials maintain that the value of services to the program's mission should also be measured in terms of the RISS program's broader goals and objectives--not just in terms of data system entries. In this view, optional services support interagency communication and thus work toward enhancing the ability to investigate criminal organizations across jurisdictions. We could not measure this contribution directly, but we found reflections of this view in Justice and project policies for providing optional services.

This concludes my prepared statement, Mr. Chairman. We would be pleased to respond to any questions.