

In early 2022, CHJT released a report about the lack of statewide criminal justice planning in RI. This report highlighted the need for an inter-agency strategic plan to improve public health and community safety, reduce costs and harm caused by the justice system, and improve statewide outcomes. RI's Public Safety Grants Administration Office (PSGAO) currently serves as both RI's State Administering Agency (SAA) and Statistical Analysis Center (SAC), which the federal government requires each state to designate for the receipt of certain federal funds. The PSGAO has historically administered approximately \$10 million of federal funds annually.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the PSGAO being a legislatively created, Governor-appointed board and office tasked with statewide justice planning, RI has failed to create statewide goals or measures for the administration of justice across law enforcement, corrections and judiciary agencies. Rhode Island's annual Public Safety section of the State's Budget (Volume IV) is comprised of nearly **\$.5 billion** of general revenue. For such a large public investment, Rhode Islanders deserve more coordination, intention, and accountability.

To address the gaps between RI's justice agencies and other statewide planning efforts, CHJT recommends relocating and restructuring RI's current justice planning work and creating a new office within RI's Department of Administration (DOA) specifically for this purpose. CHJT makes this recommendation for the following reasons:

1. DOA is already the state office tasked with inter-agency planning and coordination.
  - a. PSGAO is currently housed within the Department of Public Safety (DPS)—run by the State Police—which was not designed for public policy development or inter-departmental planning.
  - b. Situating these efforts at DOA can build capacity to leverage resources across multiple agencies and improve coordination with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which has historically played a key role in RI's strategies for justice spending.
2. DOA's mission is aligned with the PSGAO's responsibilities for statewide planning and DOA has the capacity to provide the level of support needed to fulfill the PSGAO board's statutory obligations.
3. There is an inherent conflict of interest with the PSGAO's current location at DPS, as one of the state justice agencies that could and does receive funding administered by PSGAO. There are currently no publicly communicated accountability or transparency measures that address this.
4. Research indicates that criminal justice planning is only successful with an appropriately skilled and staffed agency that works in tandem with the justice system.<sup>2</sup> These efforts should promote transparency and hold relevant justice agencies, contractors, and additional stakeholders accountable for achieving State goals.

CHJT recommends that Rhode Island stand up a new Office of Criminal Justice Planning (OCJP) that employs a full-time director who directly reports to the head of DOA. In addition to the director, the new OCJP should employ five other full-time employees that include at least one criminal justice planner, two grant administrators, one administrator, and one SAC program manager. CHJT suggests that the SAC program manager oversee a new contract that the State develops with a local university. This contract can fulfill RI's federally obligated need for a statistical analysis center, as well as explore the much-needed possibilities for working in conjunction with, or integrating with, RI's Data Ecosystem run out of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS).

At the start of 2023, administrative and planning structures for various state entities—such as EOHHS and the newly formed Department of Housing—are currently under review by RI leadership, with aims of improving the efficiency of RI's overall spending, grant administration and oversight, data collection and analysis, and inter-agency equity planning. CHJT believes the most efficient and effective coordination and administration of justice in RI should also be taken into consideration during the review of these other statewide efforts.

## WHY DOES RI NEED CRIMINAL JUSTICE PLANNING?

In 2021, a new stream of federal funding was created: the U.S. Department of Justice dedicated more than \$50 million to stand up a new Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative (CVIPI), which will be evaluated through funding made available by the National Institute of Justice.<sup>3</sup> In recognition of the growing community-based violence intervention field across the country, the overall goal of CVIPI is to prevent and reduce violent crime in communities by supporting comprehensive, evidence-based violence intervention and prevention programs.

Rhode Island is actually home to one of the country's oldest community-based violence intervention programs and has been investing in this work for more than a decade via State funding, as well as federal grants administered through the PSGAO. Given this longstanding expertise in the field, when those additional federal funds became available, RI could have been prepared for and positioned to apply for, receive and leverage those federal dollars.

Rhode Island has many unique attributes that can and should make us a model for innovative justice reform; for example, we have a unified corrections system and the smallest prison census in the country. However, we have not made notable strides in recidivism reduction and have no other defined measures for assessing our progress. The research tells us that a centralized, strategically led criminal justice planning office in RI could promote progress in three areas:

1. Coordinated cross-sector government planning and leadership that prioritizes the health and well-being of justice-involved Rhode Islanders
2. Strategic alignment of state and federal funds available for serving people involved in the criminal justice system
3. Inter-agency data sharing that informs fiscal priorities and data-driven policy across the justice system

Rhode Islanders deserve a justice system that is fair, effective, and efficient. This moment in history can be a turning point for RI to overcome the status quo and lead the nation with an innovative strategy to address mass criminalization and equity in our state.

## NOTE FROM CHJT

At the time of this printing, all but one of the PSGAO board vacancies have been filled, including an appointment for CHJT as a community service organization. The recommendations in this report reflect CHJT's vision and not those of the PSGAO board. Now, with our dual role, CHJT will continue to advocate for statewide coordinated planning for all criminal justice initiatives in Rhode Island.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Center for Health and Justice Transformation. (2021, December). *Status Report: Criminal Justice Planning in Rhode Island*. <https://healthandjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CJHT-2021-Status-Report-CJ-Planning-in-RI.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Matz, A.K., Wicklund, C., Douglas, J. & May, B. (2012, September). *Justice-health collaboration: Improving information exchange between corrections and health/human services organizations*. SEARCH Group, Incorporated. Retrieved from <http://www.search.org/files/pdf/Justice-HealthCollabBusinessCase.pdf>; Willison, J.B., Jannetta, J., Dodd, H. Neusteter, S.R., Warwick, K., Greer, K. & Matthews, A. (2012, September). *Process and systems change evaluation findings from the Transitions from Jail to Community Initiative*. Urban Institute Justice Policy Center. Retrieved from [http://www.urban.org/research/publication/process-and-systemschange-evaluation-findings-transition-jail-community-initiative/view/full\\_report](http://www.urban.org/research/publication/process-and-systemschange-evaluation-findings-transition-jail-community-initiative/view/full_report)

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Justice. (2023, January). *Community Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative (CVIPI)*. Bureau of Justice Assistance. Retrieved 1/31/2023 from <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/community-violence-intervention/additional-resources>