

There Must Be No Boundaries

To detect, deter, prevent and respond to crimes and acts of terror, while protecting the innocent and giving comfort to victims, the men and women who serve our nation in public safety, justice and homeland security agencies at all levels of government are hampered today by the lack of access to the critical information they need. Our country's ability to "ensure domestic tranquility" can only be sustained if they have access to all available information from the data sources and systems designed to facilitate decision-making in a timely fashion. When lives are at stake, including the safety of our officers and service personnel, there must be no impediment to sharing this information. In spite of the imperatives we continue to tolerate policy, territorial, cultural and technological boundaries that stand in the way of effective information sharing.

Decisions to intrude in an individual's life must be based on data that justifies an arrest, prosecution, sentencing and incarceration, especially in a nation which values the rule of law and the preservation of constitutional liberties. Moreover, the detection and prevention of acts of terror or crime must also be based on accessing and analyzing proper data. In this regard, technologies must be used to facilitate the expeditious transfer of data to the people who need it in time to matter.

In many cases our officers and service personnel don't have access to or do not receive the information they need to thwart those responsible for heinous crimes, to prevent terrorist plots and attacks or to hold people accountable for those actions. Far too often the information they need is in the hands of another agency with which they have no information sharing relationship or capabilities. Databanks kept by neighboring jurisdictions are of little use if not available to other jurisdictions in a timely fashion.

Information sharing is impeded by the construction of walls and boundaries which fail to advance any public policy end. The adoption of national standards represents a growing trend to scale these barriers or to eliminate them entirely. By formulating standards which take into account security concerns, privacy and constitutional issues, computers can be programmed to exchange information easily. The technology exists. The question is whether there is the political will to achieve this important goal. There remain many issues: (1) insufficient funding for cross-jurisdictional information sharing; (2) long-standing jurisdictional attitudes about data ownership that constrain data sharing; (3) jurisdictional inconsistencies in privacy laws and regulations, (4) fear of losing control and power; and, (5) cultural or political excuses.

If the United States seeks to achieve the level of information sharing that will enable us to preserve the safety of those who serve and our citizens alike, there must be no boundaries that prevent information sharing. Through **legislation** clarifying and enabling multi-jurisdictional information sharing; **leadership** in developing standards for interoperability; and, **funding** for cross-agency information sharing, elected officials have the opportunity to create the support systems our first responders and crime-fighters need to make this nation safer. We ask you to join us in achieving this fundamental and mandatory improvement in our capacity to make our nation safe.

The IJIS Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization composed of over 240 information sharing company representatives including senior executives of public safety and justice entities. The IJIS mission is to serve "...as the voice of industry to unite the private and public sectors to improve mission critical information sharing for those who protect and serve our communities". For more on the programs of the IJIS Institute, visit www.ijis.org.