

April [DAY], 2013

[COMMISSIONER/SECRETARY NAME AND TITLE]
[STREET ADDRESS 1]
[STREET ADDRESS 2]
[CITY, STATE, AND ZIP CODE]

Dear [COMMISSIONER/SECRETARY NAME]:

During early July, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) plans to begin work on a pilot study for one of its major surveys, the Survey of Prison Inmates (or SPI). I am writing to request your approval for staff from BJS and its data collection agent RTI International to obtain access to two facilities within your system, a minimum and a medium secure facility, for the purpose of conducting the pilot study.

By way of background, since 1974, BJS has conducted six prior versions of its SPI survey, or about one every 6 or 7 years, with the last one having been conducted in 2004. BJS uses the SPI to generate national-level estimates of the characteristics of the prison population, including characteristics that are germane to corrections management such as the severity of offenses committed and criminal history; medical, mental health, and substance abuse and dependency problems; behaviors in prison including both rule infractions and participation in programs. At the Association of State Correctional Administrators Research and Best Practices Committee meeting in January 2013, I gave a brief presentation on the SPI.

The main purposes of the pilot study are to give BJS a chance to evaluate the questionnaire and interviewing procedures for the SPI. To conduct the evaluation, we first need to select facilities, preferably (for cost containment reasons) two that are collocated. If you do not have a preference, we can nominate two from our prison facility census. Second, we need two forms of assistance from the selected facility managers: (1) a roster of inmates from which we can draw a sample of about 80 inmates to interview; and (2) assistance to the RTI staff in managing logistics associated with conducting the interviews. To conduct the interviews, RTI staff would need access to areas that are secure but out of hearing range of staff and this is because as a federal statistical agency, BJS pledges confidentiality to the interviewed inmates.

We aim to minimize disruption to your facilities. We expect that RTI will have between 4 and 8 trained interviewers on site for three days, depending on the availability of space in the facilities. While this may sound like a large number, RTI staff have extensive experience in conducting BJS surveys in prison facilities and their staff will follow all institution rules and adjust their schedules to minimize any potential disruption to facility operations.

As I'm sure you are aware, since 2007 BJS has entered your facilities for the purpose of conducting surveys required by the Prison Rape Elimination Act that are known as the National Inmate Survey (NIS). I want to let you know that neither the pilot study for SPI nor the full SPI are at all related to the aims of the NIS and reiterate that the purpose of the SPI is to produce national estimates of characteristics of prisoners and not facility-level estimates of sexual assault.

In sum, I greatly appreciate your helping BJS to conduct this pilot study, and at the same time, I want to

make sure that you have as much information as you need in order to make an informed decision about whether you will grant my requests. To that end, I want to know if you would like to schedule a telephone call with me or my staff within the next few weeks to talk about the survey. (My contact information follows.)

If on the other hand, you have enough information to decide that you will grant us access and if you choose to select the two facilities for the pilot study, then I ask that you provide me with the names and contact information of the facility managers. If you do not have a strong preference about the facilities and allow us to choose them, then after you grant permission, we will select the two facilities, let you know which ones we selected, and proceed with contacting the managers.

For any of these matters, including a follow-up call to obtain more information or decisions regarding facility names or access, you or your staff can contact me via email at William.Sabol@usdoj.gov or by phone at (202) 514-1062. Or, you may contact the chief of BJS's Corrections Statistics Program, Daniela, at Daniela.Golinelli@usdoj.gov or (202) 616-5164 and let her know.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

William J. Sabol, Ph.D., Acting Director
Bureau of Justice Statistics

cc: Daniela Golinelli, Ph.D., Bureau of Justice Statistics
Chief, Corrections Statistics Program

Lauren Glaze, Bureau of Justice Statistics
Statistician and SPI Project Manager, Corrections Statistics Program