Research on Information Sharing Under the Sex Offender Registration & Notification Act

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• Institute for Intergovernmental Research (IIR) staff

Goals

• Present an overview of “Information Sharing and the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act” project
• Present key project findings related to information sharing practices since SORNA passed
• Elicit and capture feedback on key findings

Presentation Overview

• Project background: policy context, goals, methods and approach
• Key findings
  - State implementation of SORNA standards
  - Federal systems of support: USMS, SORNA grant programs
  - Information sharing practices and issues
  - Role of information technology
• Questions, feedback and discussion
Project Background and Context

Evolution of Federal Sex Offender Registration And Notification Legislation

1994
• Jacob Wetterling Crimes Against Children Act
1996
• Megan’s Law
• Pam Lychner Act (NSOR)
1997
• CJSJR Approp. Act
1998
• Protection of Children from Sexual Predators Act
2000
• Campus Sex Crimes Prevention Act
2003
• PROTECT Act
2006
2008
2013
2016

Expansion of State Sex Offender Registries (1990-99)
Evolution of Federal Sex Offender Registration And Notification Legislation

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• Pam Lychner Act (NSOR)

1997
• CJSJR Approp. Act

1998
• Protection of Children from Sexual Predators Act

2000
• Campus Sex Crimes Prevention Act

2003
• PROTECT Act

2006
• Adam Walsh Child Protection & Safety Act (including SORNA)

2008
• KIDS Act

2013
• Military Sex Offender Reporting Act

2016
• Int’l Megan’s Law

SORNA Policy Context

Policy Problems
Inter-jurisdictional Gaps
- Incompatible information
- Insufficient coordination
- Uncovered jurisdictions (tribes, military)

Exploitable Loopholes
- “Under the radar”
- “Slipping through cracks”
- “Jurisdiction shopping”

Policy Strategies
1. Expansion of covered jurisdictions
2. Minimum standards for covered jurisdictions
3. Enhanced Enforcement via USMS
4. Federal Information Technology
5. SMART Office as coordinating entity
6. Funding & resources for covered jurisdictions

Policy Goals
1. Greater consistency of requirements across jurisdictions
2. Improved coordination when sex offenders move between jurisdictions
3. Streamlined access to sex offender information for law enforcement and the public
4. Enhanced compliance enforcement and apprehension of absconders

What Has Happened Since SORNA Passed?
I. Broad-based questions
- Where have we seen improvement in addressing the key issues identified when SORNA passed? Where have we seen continued challenges, and why?
- How, and to what extent, have federal initiatives — including investment in information system infrastructure, technical support, and grant funding to states — helped to advance SORNA's broader goals?

II. Questions specifically focused on information sharing
- What is the connection between a state’s implementation of SORNA standards and the effectiveness of its systems for exchange and sharing of information?
- What factors, independent of SORNA standards, either promote or impede the effective exchange and flow of information within and across jurisdictions?
“Big Picture” Project Goals

1. Produce analyses that respond to the aforementioned questions.
2. Provide policy-relevant data that can inform refinements to federal policy, particularly surrounding improving the utility and functionality of the nation’s systems of sex offender registration and notification.
3. Identify promising information sharing practices from the states that might serve as templates for informing both federal and state policy.
Primary Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationwide Picture</th>
<th>State Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background interviews with federal stakeholders</td>
<td>18 state-based case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMART (SMARTSOTC)</td>
<td>Site-based interviews (N ~ 139)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Center for Missing &amp; Exploited Children, DC</td>
<td>State registering agencies (management, technical staff, field agents, analysts)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporting data review and analysis</td>
<td>Supporting state agencies (e.g., corrections, probation, parole, attorneys general offices)</td>
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<td>Coded state compliance letters</td>
<td>County/local agencies</td>
</tr>
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<td>NSOPW.gov and Exchange Portal utilization</td>
<td>Supplemental data and documentation</td>
</tr>
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<td>National Sex Offender Registry (NSOR) functionality (via USMS)</td>
<td>Policy and training manuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coded SORNA Implementation Grants</td>
<td>Legislative/Executive history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation and parole agency survey and focus groups (via American Probation and Parole Assoc.)</td>
<td>Registry data (registered sex offender profiles, crimes, utilization)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coded SORNA Implementation Grants</td>
<td>Cost data where available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Diverse Cross-section of States

Summary of Findings
State Implementation of SORNA Standards

Barriers to implementation in context of state experiences

SORNA Substantial Implementation Designations

*Substantial implementation designation subsequently withdrawn.
Defining SORNA Implementation: Not a Binary

- 14 standard areas
- Three possible designations for each standard area:
  - Meets standard
  - Does not substantially disserve standard
  - Does not meet standard
- Substantial Implementation
  - Meets or does not substantially disserve all 14 standards

Most standards are met, or not diserved, by a majority of states.

- "Does not diserve" is common for some standards, suggesting possible need for policy adjustments.
- "Does not meet" designations generally linked to limited cluster of sub-issues.

Most states meet (or do not disserve) a majority of standards.

All states but one (Kansas) deviate from standards in some way, including those substantially implemented.
State Experiences with SORNA Implementation: Insights From Case Studies

Typology of State SORNA Implementation Journeys

- **Implemented more significant change**
  - Michigan
  - Pennsylvania
  - Washington
  - California
  - Texas

- **Implemented limited change**
  - Florida
  - Alabama
  - Missouri

- **Not implemented more significant divergence**
  - New Mexico
  - Iowa

- **Not implemented limited divergence**
  - Alaska
  - Hawaii

**MORE DIFFICULT**
- Significant net-widening impacts
- Major legal rulings in response
- Operational and resource challenges
- Pennsylvania lost designation in 2018

**LESS DIFFICULT**
- More uniform requirements (i.e., fewer registered sex offender distinctions)
- Varied organizational structures, dynamics and levels of resource investment
Typology of State SORNA Implementation Journeys

MORE DIVERGENCE FROM SORNA
- Deeply invested in systems predating federal mandates
- Varied ideas on registry core purposes
- Significant county/local control

CLOSER SORNA ALIGNMENT
- Post-SORNA changes modest and incremental
- Legislative barriers to meeting limited remaining standards

Washington
California
Texas

New Mexico
Iowa

Not implemented
more significant divergence

Not implemented
limited divergence

Factors Affecting State Progress Toward SORNA Standards

Pre-SORNA Conditions
- System investment and "distance to travel"
- Historical goals and orientation of registry system
- State approach to criminal justice policy

Legal/Political
- Legislative dynamics
- Intergovernmental dynamics (state, county, local relations)
- Judicial culture and climate
- Role of policy boards and coalitions

Organizational
- Levels of (and priorities for) resource investment
- System design and management
- Enforcement
- Quality assurance
- Agency culture and locus of control

Summary
- SORNA implementation is multi-faceted, not binary.
- Implementation picture looks different in every state.
- Significant progress has been made:
  - Most standards met by majority of states.
  - Most states meet majority of standards.
- Most departures concentrated among limited group of standards and sub-standards:
  - Some modest and incremental
  - Others more foundational (e.g., risk classification, juveniles, retroactivity)
Evaluating the Costs of SORNA Implementation

• Myth: SORNA implementation is uniformly costly.
  ◦ Commonly cited 2009 Justice Policy Institute analysis
    • SORNA implementation costs far exceed lost Byrne JAG funding across every state
    • Simplistic and deeply flawed methodology
• Finding: Costs of SORNA implementation varies greatly from state to state.

Variation in SORNA Costs

Varied Implementation Pathways

- "Distance to travel"
- Political, organizational and legal conditions

Varied Choices And Priorities

- Field-based verification
- Risk assessment systems and training
- Investment in robust investigatory functions
- Significant field training emphasis

Role of Federal Support and Resources
### United States Marshals Service

**Central Support**
- NSOTC
- Behavioral Analysis Unit
- NCMEC/SOTT

**SOIB Field Operations**
- Regional Sex Offender Investigations Branch Operations
- District-based SOICs

### SORNA Mandate

“The Attorney General shall use the resources of Federal law enforcement, including the United States Marshals Service, to assist jurisdictions in locating and apprehending sex offenders who violate sex offender registration requirements.”

### Broad Range of Functions

**Enforcement operations**
- Bridge-building and cross-jurisdictional collaboration
- Information brokers
- Intelligence and analytic expertise
- Training
- Funding support for local operations
United States Marshals Service

Widely viewed by stakeholders as a supportive and collaborative agency facilitating development and maintenance of state and tribal registration activities.

Federal Support for State System Improvement

**SORNA Grants**
- 250 awards
- $57.8 million

**JAG Reinvestment**
- 177 reallocations
- $31.1 million

State Uses of SORNA Grant and JAG Reinvestment Funds (through 2017)

- Policy Development
- Information Sharing
- Stabilization
- State Planning
- Personnel
- Verification & Enforcement Operations
- Training
- IT & Cyber
- Test & Evaluation
- Test & Hardware
- Administration

- SORNA Grants
- JAG Reinvestment
Will they make sure to note that the time frames are different? SORNA is a 10 year period, while the JAG is 5 years?

Blazucki, Sarah, 7/9/2019
State Information Sharing Practices

Evolution of State Information Sharing Practices Since SORNA

- Culture of information-sharing: Significant attunement to interjurisdictional transfer issues across sample of states — noted improvement since SORNA.
- Relationship with SORNA standards: No evidence of relationship between SORNA implementation status and effectiveness of information sharing practices.
  - States supportive of and working toward enhanced information sharing practices regardless of SORNA implementation status.

Concerns Related to Information Sharing
Data Quality

- Data quality assurance (DQA) is a major area of focus for state registry agencies, yet largely independent of SORNA.
- Prominent Challenges
  - Decentralized processes/range of local users
  - Resource-intensive of effective DQA
- Diffuse range of methods for achieving DQA goals: training, technical/analytic staff, automated interfaces, field-based verification, local law enforcement staff resources, model policies, audit functions
- SORNA grant programs and USMS financial support highly instrumental.

Data Access

- Demand for richer data and information for range of uses across range of stakeholder groups:
  - Registry enforcement (federal, state, local), investigative tools, local registered sex offender monitoring and risk management, planning and resource deployment
- Prominent needs and challenges
  - Reporting and decision support capacity
  - Unmet data needs: court records, arrests/charges, offenses details beyond conviction offense of record (e.g., victim age)
  - Most needs independent of SORNA

Data Consistency

- Need for comparability of information across jurisdictions
- Key area of SORNA emphasis
- Prominent Challenges
  - Differences in state criminal codes (statutory cross-walk resources)
  - Persistent differences in state laws governing registry requirements
  - Broad and diverse universe of users and systems
  - Limits of NSOR data fields and definitions
Data Exchange

- SORNA call for immediate transfer of information
- Use of both analog and technology-focused systems
- Disparate practices across jurisdictions

- Prominent issues
  - Varied methods of communication
  - NSOR and Exchange Portal limitations
  - "Ownership" problem

Information Systems: Data Integration and Interoperability

Sex Offender Registration and Notification IT Ecosystem
SORNA Vision

1. Capacity to seamlessly link systems for law enforcement use
2. Capacity to seamlessly link systems for public information
3. Efficient methods of exchanging information when offenders relocate
   - Timely, meaningful and accurate exchange of information between sending and receiving jurisdictions
   - Centralized methods of tracking interjurisdictional transfers and identifying absconders
4. Improved compatibility of information across states, based on standardized data definitions

SORNA and Information Exchange

“The Attorney General shall ensure (through the National Sex Offender Registry or otherwise) that updated information about a sex offender is immediately transmitted by electronic forwarding to all relevant jurisdictions.”

Communication Mechanisms RE: RSO Relocations

- Extensive variation across jurisdictions.
- To date, no commonly shared and trackable method.

National Sex Offender Registry (NSOR)

- One of 21 NCIC files/14 NCIC “person files”
- “Point in time” system (i.e., fields overwritten when updated)
- ~1.4 million records, covering ~900,000 individuals
  - ~850,000 active records and ~550,000 cleared records
  - 27% of registered sex offenders with 2+ records
- State processes to populate and update NSOR vary.

Evaluating NSOR as Information Sharing Tool

- Accuracy and reliability of NSOR information
- Data Quality
- Data Exchange
- NSOR capacity as informational bridge
- Data Access
- Data Consistency
- Compatibility of NSOR data across jurisdictions
SORNA Exchange Portal

• 2008 roll-out, 2014 update
• Functionality
  - Relocation tasks (core function)
  - Statutory history database
  - Document repository (e.g., USMS, International Megan’s Law)
  - Discussion board

Portal Use

• 88,000 tasks to date
• Use increasing, but likely capturing limited subset of relocations
• High variation in —
  □ State usage
  □ Level and types of information provided

Factors Affecting Portal Use

• Legal constraints
  □ e.g., sharing with non-law enforcement
• Operational constraints
  □ Limited number of authorized users
  □ Bandwidth/availability of registry resources
  □ Information system interfaces and workflow
• Reliance on alternative methods
Communication Mechanisms RE: RSO Relocations

- Extensive variation across jurisdictions.
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Other Areas Examined Through Study

- Probation and parole roles in, and interface with, sex offender registration and notification systems
- Registries as sources of public information
- State–tribal nexus and coordination
- For more details, contact us!

SORNA Policy Goals Revisited

Policy Goals
1. Greater consistency of requirements across jurisdictions
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Policy Problems
INTER-JURISDICTIONAL GAPS
- Incompatible information
- Insufficient coordination
- Uncovered jurisdictions (e.g., tribes, military)
- Lax standards in some states

EXPLOITABLE LOOPHOLES
- "Under the radar"
- "Slipping through cracks"
- "Jurisdiction shopping"
Policy Goals

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Areas of Success

- Progress toward SORNA standards: Most met by most states (and vice versa)
- Expanded attunement to inter-jurisdictional issues and culture of information sharing
- USMS facilitation role
- Growing use of SORNA Exchange Portal
- Expanded USMS and SORNA grants for improvements to state systems
- Expanded USMS and NDOT role in enforcement operations
- SORNA grants for enforcement and verification operations

Areas for Development

- Limited but persistent gaps between some state policies and SORNA framework
- Disparate methods of communication
- Gaps in protocols, e.g., “ownership problem”
- Uneven SEP utilization
- States’ needs for richer array of reliable and actionable information
- Need for enhanced data management systems for tracking and identifying potential absconders.

Looking Ahead

- Upcoming presentations
  - American Society of Criminology (San Francisco, November 2019)
    - Selected project findings
    - Sex Offender Registration and Notification policy and practice showcase/forum (California and Washington)
- Final project report
  - Draft submitted to NIJ and SMART — September 2019
  - Peer and agency review (September–November)
  - Final revised report – December 2019
- Additional expected work products (2020)
  - Policy and model practice briefs
  - Journal publications

Thank you for your time and attention.
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