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2023 Oklahoma Death in Custody Reporting Act State Implementation Plan

Background

The Death in Custody Reporting Act (DCRA) mandates that all states report to the Attorney General about the deaths of individuals in custody. This includes those detained, under arrest, being arrested, en route to incarceration, or already incarcerated. The State Administering Agencies (SAAs) responsible for DCRA data collection are also accountable for submitting this information to the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) as part of their Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) reporting. In Oklahoma, the Oklahoma District Attorneys Council (DAC) is the designated SAA for the JAG grant.

Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to outline the activities undertaken by the Oklahoma District Attorneys Council to comply with the Death in Custody Reporting Act and to detail ongoing efforts to enhance these activities.

DCRA Data Collection Infrastructure

Oklahoma has a diverse correctional landscape, comprising 21 state prisons, two private prisons, and around 91 municipal and county jails. Reporting on deaths in custody is governed by two key statutes: 19 O.S. § 513.1, which outlines jail supervision standards set by the State Department of Health, and 63 O.S. § 938 A (6), which mandates the Oklahoma Chief Medical Examiner's office to investigate such deaths. To achieve DCRA reporting goals, the DAC collaborates with the Oklahoma Department of Health, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections, and the Oklahoma Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. The DAC's focus is currently on these agencies for data collection, with the goal of improving reporting activities.

Data Collection Methods

In accordance with Oklahoma state law, deaths in custody investigations are reported to the Office of the Medical Examiner, making it the most reliable source for arrest-related, jail-based, and prison-based deaths. To ensure thoroughness, data is also collected from the Oklahoma Department of Health for jail-based deaths and the Oklahoma Department of Corrections for prison-based deaths. Despite challenges stemming from staffing changes following the COVID-19 period, the DAC is committed to addressing these issues and aligning its staffing capacity accordingly.

Data Reporting Methods

The DAC employs a manual data entry approach to report DCRA data to the BJA through the PMT system. The Office of the Medical Examiner provides the most detailed data, which the DAC cross-references with records from the Oklahoma Department of Corrections and the Oklahoma Department of Health. This method applies to open and pending investigation records as well, with updates from the Office of the Medical Examiner on a quarterly basis.

Enhancements and Future Directions

To further enhance the implementation of the DCRA, the DAC is considering the following steps:

- Requesting DCRA training and technical assistance (TTA) from the Justice Statistics and Research Association (JSRA)
- Establishing a dedicated DCRA website to centralize information and resources
- Providing training and technical assistance (TTA) to other state and local agencies
- Expanding communication to include the Oklahoma Statistical Analysis Center
- Exploring opportunities for automation to streamline the data collection and reporting process
- Implementing a data validation process to ensure accuracy and consistency

Conclusion

This plan underscores the DAC's commitment to fulfilling DCRA reporting requirements and improving these efforts over time. Through collaboration, technology, and continuous evaluation, the DAC aims to ensure accurate and comprehensive reporting of deaths in custody in the state of Oklahoma.