



Transcript: Justice Matters – Responsibilities of a State Administering Agency, an Interview With Michael Kane, Part 1

The Bureau of Justice Assistance Justice Podcast Series is designed to provide the latest information in justice innovations, practices, and perspectives from the field of criminal justice. In this edition, James H. Burch II, Acting Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, is joined by Michael Kane, Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). In part 1 of this interview, Michael Kane talks about PCCD's responsibilities as a state administering agency (SAA)* and how PCCD distributes Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) funds to local communities.

Jim Burch: Hello, friends and colleagues. I'm Jim Burch for the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and welcome to another edition of BJA's Justice Podcast Series. Today, we invite you to join in our conversation with Michael Kane, the Executive Director for the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, also known as PCCD, and also Pennsylvania's BJA State Administering Agency representative, or SAA.

Prior to joining PCCD in 2005, Michael served as the Deputy Secretary for Enforcement at the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue, and prior to that, he served more than 18 years for the Department of Justice as an Assistant United States Attorney for the middle district of Pennsylvania. And he also served as a Senior Deputy Attorney General in the Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General.

Michael, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today. Why don't we start off with you telling us a little bit about some of the particular challenges that Pennsylvania is facing that have helped you to shape your priorities as a state administering agency for the Justice Assistance Grants, or JAG, Program?

Michael Kane: Sure, the . . . one of the biggest issues that Pennsylvania faces at both the state and the local level is the size of our jail—prison population—and what is driving the prison to have so many inmates and the cost of—the associated cost of—keeping those facilities and expanding the capacity at the state level and also at the local level. And those, as you get into looking at the reasons behind it, the causes behind it, they bring to the front some subissues. And you find, as most states have, drug dependency, alcohol dependency, [and] mental health issues are driving the prison population. And so, our priorities then focus on how do we

alleviate some of these issues and thereby reduce our prison population. And so when we've shaped our priorities using the JAG, a lot of it has been around what kinds of initiatives that we can have that will address drug and alcohol addiction, address mental health and how mental health drives—mental health problems drive—so many admissions into local jails and into the state prison system.

And then on top of that you have the budget: the state budget and the local county budgets. Everybody is under a crunch, and so in shaping our priorities we have to take that into account. That there are certain initiatives that, in the past, the state has made investments in and the local counties have made investments in that are not there anymore just because the money is not there anymore. And so [there's the challenge of] how can we utilize our funding—obviously we are not going to make up for a billion dollar budget shortfall—but how can we keep things going in the interim so that the inertia that has been developed in a particular strategy or approach can be maintained through this tough budget time and then when things get better will still be there as opposed to being eliminated in the process.

And so that, when we've developed our justice system's grant plan, we've certainly taken those things into account and tried to develop a plan that addresses those.

Jim Burch: Alright, well that sounds like a very sort of strategic focus and one of the things I've learned from talking to you here today is that this is really the way you all do business throughout the organization; it's a very strategic focus and it results for us in a very strategic use of the JAG funds, which I think is exactly how it was intended to be used. One of the questions I have for you is regarding those priorities. How do you, once you've identified what those priorities are, how do you communicate those priorities to the justice practitioners and the communities around the State of Pennsylvania?

Michael Kane: Well, one of the things that we have worked a lot on developing is county-based strategic planning among the various players in the county justice system. And we've done that through the development of criminal justice advisory boards [CJABs]. The criminal justice advisory board is made up of chiefs of police, the district attorney, the courts, probation, the jails, victim services—all the players that have

* SAAs are the state administering agencies, appointed by each Governor, which set program priorities and allocate Justice Assistance Grant funds within that state.

a role in what the final outcome is in each county. And we've developed that directly and indirectly. We've done it through providing funding for the startup to bring in oftentimes an organizer who can bring the people together and actually run the meetings. And we've also done it indirectly by incentivizing the development of these criminal justice advisory boards by making funding available only through a county CJAB. And by doing that, it's done two things: (1) It's given us the ability to find out from these county justice advisory boards what their issues are, what problems they face. And we do that by having a liaison from PCCD at each of the meetings—and we have four liaisons, and we've broken the state out into four regions—and they're there to listen, to hear, and then bring back to us what the local concerns are. And at the same time, that gives us the capacity to drive the information the other way, to let the locals know where we're coming from, what we have available, what our priorities and initiatives are so that they can take advantage of that. And it's created, I think, a very workable two-way street for communication of information, priorities at the local level, and priorities at the state level. As one of our directors likes to say, "When the state shows up at the local meetings, that's a big deal to the local practitioners." And that gives us a presence so that it's not just simply, "We're from the state, we're here to help." We are from the state and we are at their meetings and we are helping. We are making funding available, but we are also there to provide technical assistance on best practices and things of that nature.

Jim Burch: That's great, and it sounds like it's a two-way process of communication that you all value and that's really been successful for you in achieving something that a lot of people talk about but never do, which is bottoms-up planning, and that's just such a great thing and a credit to you all and a credit to the state. Tell me a little bit about who the stakeholders are that participate in this planning process and, if you could, both at the CJAB, or County Justice Advisory Board, level as well as at the state level.

Michael Kane: Well, in addition to the CJABs, which are the local people, we are statutorily configured so that we have a commission that is made up of 45 individuals from various constituencies, but we also have advisory committees, some of them are statutory, some of them are established by the commission itself. And that's where the real work gets done in the planning and development of initiatives. And so by having a CJAB with all of the local players and having those CJABS represented in our advisory committees, we're able to not only find out what the needs are out there, but to develop strategies to meet those needs through our advisory committees. And so what we—what the resolve is—is that we're able to develop a strategic plan or a strategic approach to a problem by having that process, by having that infrastructure at the local level, having it at the state level within our organization, and the result is that when we learn about problems and learn . . . and I'll give you an example. Repeatedly, we hear from the locals about their institutions being filled with people that have mental health problems, and some of those mental health problems have translated into violent crime. Some of it is just people become, for lack of a better word, a nuisance and they end up in jail, and then they stay in jail and they stay longer than other people in jail. And so by hearing about that from the locals, hearing about it in our advisory committees,

we're able to then look and say what are the practices that are available out there to address these problems and develop funding strategies around those practices, either in mental health court or just other innovative initiatives, to deal with mental health and people in the criminal justice system.

And so, it's not only—it's the state as well as the local planning that kind of combines itself at that committee level and then gets translated into recommendations to the commission for funding.

Jim Burch: So it sounds like you've got both levels represented, and I assume by calling it the criminal justice commission that it's also multidisciplinary, if you will; it represents all of the stakeholders in the justice system?

Michael Kane: Right. Our committee is a committee on crime and delinquency, and it includes victim services, juvenile justice, public safety, and that's the core of the system. And there are representatives from the state district attorney's office, there are representatives from the courts, from the chiefs of police association; we have victim service actual providers, we have the state victim service coalitions, both for domestic violence and for sexual assault, and so—and then we also have a legislature—and so we have representatives of just about every decisionmaker and everybody who has the expertise in all of the different areas that are key to a successful criminal justice system represented on our commission. And so they can bring their own expertise, but also, at the committee level, it's even driven down further to have that kind of expertise within public safety. For example, we'll have several chiefs of police, several district attorneys; you know, these are the people who are in the field, dealing with this day to day; and so the combination, I think, of having those advisory committees and then having the expertise itself on the commission, I think, really gives us an advantage because it's institutionalized the process through this statutory structure.

Jim Burch: That's great. Now, within a process like that—it's a very large process for you to manage—how do you all ensure that there's some emphasis on evidence-based strategies, evidence-based ideas in the work that you do and that there's fidelity in how those approaches are implemented?

Michael Kane: Well, I think we do this through several means. We have tried to invest in training and technical assistance to a lot of initiatives; for example, in the juvenile area, we've partnered with Penn State University and with the Department of Public Welfare to develop—and we also have a Juvenile Court Judges Commission—and we've partnered with them to develop a resource, a center for evidence-based practices that not only promotes the use of evidence-based practices but provides technical assistance to local communities to implement evidence-based practices, and also operates as our eyes and ears to ensure that when we provide funding for an evidence-based program, whether it's a blueprint program or other, that the program is carried out with fidelity to the model. And we've tried to duplicate that approach in other areas as well.

The other thing, I think, that has really given us a leg up in that area is that we don't accept unsolicited grant applications. All of our grants are made in response to funding announcements

that we put out on the street to local communities through the local CJABs. And that gives us a great deal of control over not only what the initiatives [are] that we want to fund, which of course are developed with that local input, but also how those initiatives are going to be carried out. And so when we put together a funding announcement, we're, our staff is well aware of what works and what doesn't work and so we—we're never under pressure to fund something that we know doesn't work because it's initiated by us. And so we can incorporate something in an initiative using—and we have consultants and we have researchers that are on our commission, on our advisory committees, and we work with them so when we put it out on the street, we are specific about what the requirements are to be—to have this money available; most of the money is put out on a competitive basis. And so we can weed out projects that don't respond to those evidence-based approaches that we are mandating in these funding announcements.

Jim Burch: Well that's great, thank you Michael. And it's great to hear how the competitive grant process has really reinforced the use of evidence-based strategies here in Pennsylvania.

Now for our listeners, I want to thank you for tuning in to today's podcast. To listen to part 2 of my conversation with Michael Kane, please click on the podcast directly underneath the one that you've just listened to—should be labeled Part 2—available in the menu located on the left-hand column of your screen.

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