

SEARCH¹ Recommendations

FY 2020 Department of Justice Funding

Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations

March 4, 2019

National Criminal History Improvement Program (NCHIP) and

National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) Act Record Improvement Program (NARIP):

- Criminal records play a vital role in both criminal justice and civil decisionmaking.
 - These records are critical for conducting effective law enforcement investigations, proper sentencing of offenders, making decisions to protect our nation's vulnerable populations, developing strategies to help former offenders reenter society successfully, and making firearms transaction decisions.
 - The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), which is used for decisions regarding firearms transactions, draws information from several criminal records databases, including state and federal criminal history records and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC).
 - Improvements to criminal history record system information sharing in all areas (e.g. felony convictions, illegal drug usage, misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence, protection and restraining orders) will yield better decisions for all criminal justice and civil decisionmaking, as well as those for firearms transactions.
- NCHIP and NARIP each focus on improvements to the efficiency, effectiveness, timeliness, and accuracy of criminal history record and associated data for decisionmaking purposes, *but each program emphasizes specific and distinct goals:*
 - NCHIP funding allows states to focus on a *broad range* of criminal history improvement activities that are unique and specific to each state. **All states qualify for NCHIP funding.**
 - NARIP funding focuses specifically on improving information sharing with NICS for firearms purchases. **To date, NARIP funds are only available to 31 states, as not all states qualify for the funding.**

SEARCH Recommendations to Members of Congress:

- SEARCH applauds the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate for increasing funding for NCHIP and NARIP in recent years. Funding for NCHIP and NARIP has enabled states to modernize and enhance operations and technology to more effectively share data for criminal justice and public safety decisions.
- SEARCH recommends that both NCHIP and NARIP continue to receive robust funding to improve their criminal history records in support of general criminal justice and civil decisionmaking, as well as improvements to background screening for firearms purchases.
- SEARCH recommends that states be allowed to use funding at their discretion to address the specific challenges each state faces in making more records available to the national system, and thereby improve criminal justice and civil decisionmaking, and decisions regarding firearms transactions.
 - States have made substantial progress in making mental health records available to NICS (see: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/bjs/grants/249793.pdf>). Many states also need to target information sharing in the other prohibitor categories to further improve their information sharing to NICS. Restricting grant funding to require that funds be used exclusively for mental health records can inhibit broader enhancements to the overall system and jeopardize improvements in other critical justice information categories. Accordingly, SEARCH recommends flexibility to use funds to address the most critical needs for NCHIP and NARIP enhancements.

For more information, please contact Melissa Nee (melissa@search.org).

¹ SEARCH, The National Consortium for Justice Information and Statistics, is a nonprofit membership organization created by and for the states. SEARCH's Governor-appointed, dues-paying Members from the states and territories have the responsibility, among other things, to oversee both the National Criminal History Improvement Program (NCHIP) and the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) Act Record Improvement Program (NARIP) within their states.