

## #6: 2018 Survey Reveals State Practices in Using Mobile Technology to Capture and Transmit Fingerprints

By Becki Goggins and Dennis DeBacco

This is the sixth in a series of blogs that explore findings from the *Survey of State Criminal History Information Systems, 2018*, published by the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS). This biennial national survey represents the most current and detailed snapshot of the data, trends, policies, practices, and operations of criminal history records repositories nationwide. SEARCH, with the support of BJS, has conducted these surveys since 1989. This blog explores state practices in using mobile technology and rapid identification devices.

As a part of the *Survey of State Criminal History Information Systems, 2018*, SEARCH asked states about their practices related to using mobile fingerprint technology (MFT) and rapid identification (Rapid ID) services. The survey responses regarding these practices are summarized below.

### Mobile Fingerprint Technology

Many local law enforcement and public safety agencies, courts, and correctional and detention facilities use mobile technology to capture and transmit fingerprints to facilitate inquiries of their state criminal history records repository and related justice information systems. These inquiries are used to:

- **establish positive identification of subjects** whose identity is unknown or questionable, and
- **verify the identity of subjects at critical decision points** in the justice enterprise.

These remote and hand-held devices allow an officer or other criminal justice official to capture one or more fingerprints to positively verify or establish the identity of a subject through state Automated Biometric Identification Systems (ABIS) and the FBI's Next Generation Identification (NGI) System. The devices—which feature fingerprint scanners that are typically about the size of a postage stamp—are commonly used by law enforcement for identification purposes during

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#### Editor's Note:

Learn more about the [biennial national survey](#) of state criminal history information systems, conducted by SEARCH and published by BJS

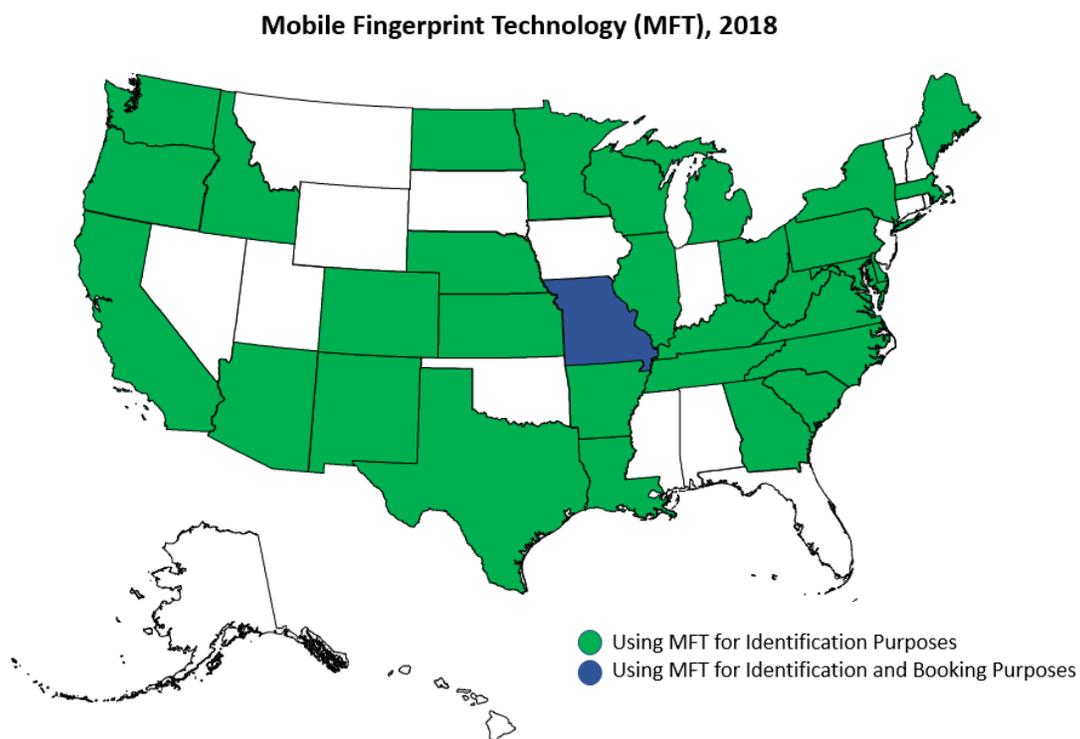
See our [blog](#) announcing the release of the 2018 survey

Access the 2018 [survey](#)

See other blogs in this series, which highlight critical trends and metrics

traffic stops, when serving warrants, or during cite-and-release events. Additionally, they can be used to establish the identity of deceased crime or accident victims and victims of disasters. Courts can use them to verify the identity of defendants appearing before them at critical events, such as sentencing, and correctional agencies often employ the technology to verify the identity of inmates at intake, booking, transfer, and release.

As of year-end 2018, 32 states (up from 30 states in the 2016 survey) and the District of Columbia reported using mobile fingerprint technology for remote identification and booking purposes (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 1**

In addition to establishing identity with biometric precision, mobile fingerprint readers have other advantages:

- **The technology can be used in the field to establish identity without requiring that a subject be transported to a booking facility for fingerprinting.** This is especially helpful when subjects are cited and released. Using MFT ensures that the arresting event can be biometrically supported for inclusion in a state’s criminal history repository. Rapid identification of suspects significantly contributes to officer and public safety by enabling

<sup>1</sup> Becki R. Goggins and Dennis DeBacco, [Survey of State Criminal History Information Systems, 2018](#). (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2020), Table 10d.

the officer in the field to quickly establish the identity of wanted/missing persons and other subjects of interest.

- **The technology enables law enforcement to quickly *exclude* people from consideration when they are incorrectly suspected of being a wanted party or other subject of interest.** With MFT, officers can quickly correct a misidentification without having to transport the person to a central booking facility for traditional fingerprinting.
- **Remotely capturing fingerprints of arrested subjects is effective during major events, where law enforcement agencies are deployed to ensure public safety.** If multiple arrests are made, officers can book and fingerprint subjects in temporary holding facilities without the immediate need to transport them to distant agency detention centers.
- **Remote and handheld fingerprint devices are relatively inexpensive and easy-to-use,** and do not require the space, computer networking, and other infrastructure required for traditional livescan devices.

## Mobile and Rapid ID Implementation: A Pennsylvania Success Story

The Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association and the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency's Local Technology Workgroup, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania State Police, has provided over 200 mobile fingerprinting devices (called "Mobile ID") to local police departments to



conduct fingerprint searches from the field. The purpose of the program is to positively identify individuals who do not have an ID during traffic stops to see if they may be a danger to the officer or to the community. If an individual does not have a driver's license or other identification, officers equipped with a Mobile ID unit can capture their fingerprint for comparison with state and FBI databases. Within three minutes, the officer will receive a response of a **match**,

**no match**, or **possible match**. The Mobile ID technology improves productivity as officers do not have to take someone to a jail or booking station for fingerprinting simply because they do not have identification. Mobile ID also promotes officer and community safety as the officer will be notified if the individual is a dangerous offender. The system also alerts the officer if the individual has an outstanding warrant which can prevent a wanted person from going free.<sup>2</sup>

## Rapid Fingerprint Identification (Rapid ID)

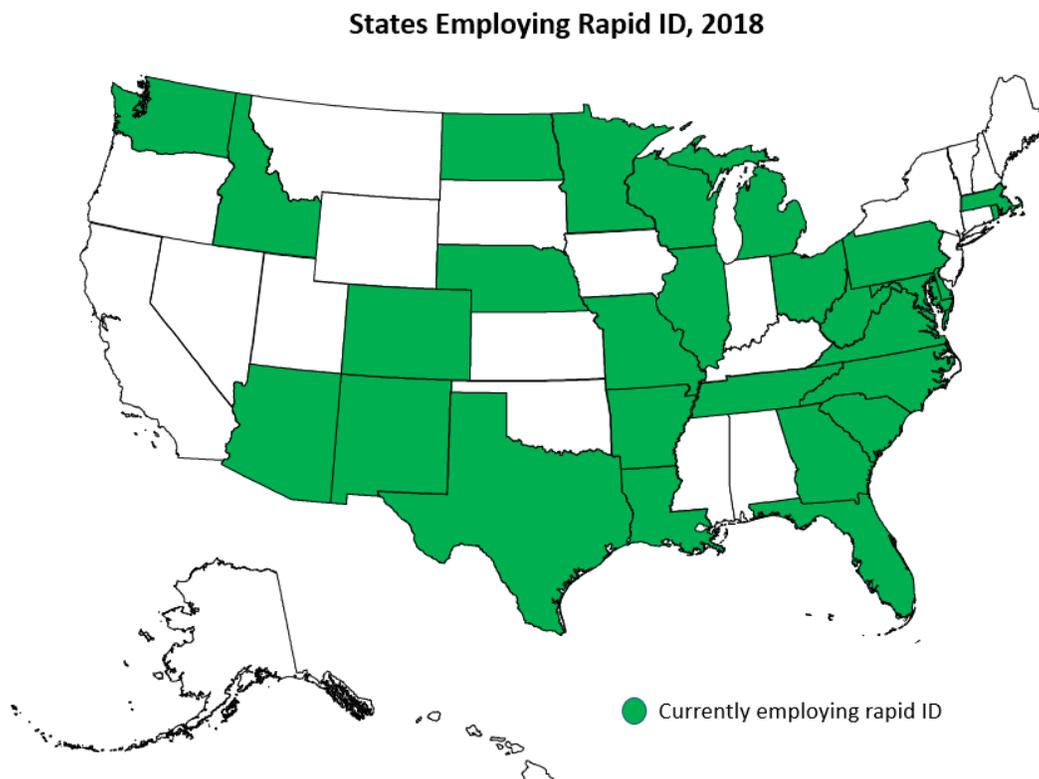
Rapid ID technology enables authorized users to instantly search local, state, and federal ABIS databases to confirm the identity of a person via fingerprints captured using mobile or tethered fingerprint devices, and to query various criminal justice databases for additional information about the individual. Rapid ID searches can include:

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pachiefs.org/mobile-fingerprint-id>

- Criminal history record information
- Outstanding warrants/missing persons
- Sex offender status
- Probation and parole supervision status
- Caution indicators, and
- Mugshots.

Rapid ID also allows authorized users to search the FBI's Repository of Individuals of Special Concern (RISC), which was introduced in 2011, and is accessible to law enforcement officers nationwide. The search, which is conducted through the FBI's NGI system, promotes officer safety and situational awareness by providing on-scene access to a national repository of wants and warrants. RISC searches also return data from the NCIC Immigration Violator file, the Known or Appropriately Suspected Terrorists file, and information concerning convicted sex offenders.<sup>3</sup>

By year-end 2018, 28 states (up from 25 states in the 2016 survey) had deployed Rapid ID. (See green-shaded states in Figure 2.)



**Figure 2**

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/repository-for-individuals-of-special-concern-brochure.pdf/view>

States that have deployed Rapid ID conducted over 1.5 million searches in 2018, which produced over 996,000 “hits” or positive identifications.<sup>4</sup> The numbers vary widely from state to state, which possibly reflects variations in how broadly the technology is deployed and the operational context in which it is used. In correctional facilities, for example, MFT and Rapid ID technology is often used to verify the identity of inmates when they enter and exit the facility, and at other points when inmates—

- are transported to appear in court, return from outside medical facilities, or community work details,
- transfer to another unit within the same facility,
- are administered medications, and
- are in other circumstances where positive identification is crucial.

Similarly, probation and parole clients might have their identity regularly confirmed as they seek and receive various services and meet with their case manager.



#### About the Authors

Ms. Becki Goggins is Director of Law and Policy at SEARCH. She oversees our work in the areas of criminal history records, development of laws and policies concerning the use of justice information and protection of privacy, implementation of evidence-based practices, and the use of technology to improve justice information sharing. As an organization, SEARCH was originally founded to facilitate the exchange of criminal history record information (CHRI) between the states.



Mr. Dennis DeBacco is a Justice Information Services Specialist at SEARCH. He researches and writes about issues that impact criminal justice information management and policy; organizes conferences and workshops; establishes and supports task forces; conducts surveys on pertinent issues; and provides technical assistance to justice agencies.

Learn more about SEARCH’s work with [criminal history records](#) and the [surveys we conduct](#) on CHRI issues.

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*SEARCH staff continue to analyze the results of the 2018 Survey with the intention of making the data more accessible by drafting blogs to explain and provide context for the survey findings. If you have suggestions for topics you would like to see highlighted, or if you have specific questions about survey findings, please contact Becki Goggins ([becki@search.org](mailto:becki@search.org)) or Dennis DeBacco ([dennis@search.org](mailto:dennis@search.org)).*

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<sup>4</sup> See Table 10d in the 2018 Survey. A “hit” is a positive database search response to a Rapid ID inquiry that is conducted using a subject’s fingerprints.