
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About 95 percent of a typical law enforcement agency's budget is dedicated to personnel. The scarce resources left over are spent on basic equipment, such as cars, radios, and side arms. There is little money available to purchase the new tools necessary to keep up with criminals. Better efforts to get technology onto the streets is needed to provide modern crime-fighting technologies to the nation's local law enforcement agencies.

The Clinton administration is proposing an increase in federal assistance to state and local law enforcement agencies, to augment their resources to develop, test, integrate, and train in the use of new technological tools needed to fight crime and improve public safety.

Although crime rates have declined over the past several years, the public remains fearful and expects its government—at all levels—to do more. Law enforcement is principally a state and local responsibility; yet many jurisdictions lack the revenue base to meet the demands of technological modernization. Additionally, some specialized or expensive technologies needed only occasionally by any one local agency can more economically be provided by technology assistance from the federal level.

This report provides contextual information bearing on four facets of law enforcement technology proposals by the Clinton administration:

1. technology assistance
2. technology deployment

3. crime lab modernization

4. training.

State and local law enforcement agencies commonly work with and receive technical assistance from a number of federal agencies, including the Justice Department, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and others. In addition to this, the National Institute of Justice has established a system of four regional National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Centers (NLECTCs), four NLECTC Special Offices, and a national center to provide what we are calling “technology assistance” and assistance with technology deployment. Each of these is collocated with technology research and development organizations, such as The Aerospace Corporation, to leverage this federal investment with existing infrastructure.

These NLECTCs have responded to some 10,000 requests for assistance annually. Examples of technology assistance include

- audio enhancement of tape recordings
- still-photo enhancement of surveillance videotapes
- computer file analysis
- metallurgical analysis
- assistance with crime mapping analysis.

The proposed initiative would add 10 regional NLECTCs to the 4 currently operating. This would reduce the areas served by each regional center from the current 10–15 states to a more manageable 3–5 states. The intent is to provide better quick-response service to local agencies.

The NLECTC Special Offices are currently facilitating technology deployment to state and local law enforcement agencies through grants awarded for technology development, testing and evaluation of new technology, and support for technology acquisition. Technology under development ranges from a “smart gun” designed to safeguard officers from being shot by their own weapons, to safer means of handling vehicle pursuits, to a host of counterterrorism

technologies. One of these offices tests and evaluates technologies by using an annual mock prison riot.

In addition, although modern crime labs are an essential part of law enforcement and criminal prosecution, the nation's laboratories vary widely in capability and capacity. The proposed initiative would help state and local laboratories modernize to better meet the need.

Local law enforcement officials have also consistently identified training as a major shortfall. Smaller departments, in particular, find it difficult to break away personnel to get the training they need. This cuts across all areas, including crime labs. The proposed initiative would build on a Department of Justice/Department of Defense partnership to make training more accessible through increased use of modern training technology, as well as National Guard and other existing training infrastructure.

Certain well-publicized instances of police being out-gunned by criminals have heightened awareness of the need to help local agencies acquire better weapons and protective technology. This report recommends federal funding in each of these areas, as well as more in-depth study to determine more definitively what law enforcement technologies are currently in use across the nation, how well they are performing, and how the federal government might most effectively and efficiently assist technological modernization.