



CHRIS NOCCO, SHERIFF

OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF

TEAMWORK ♦ PROFESSIONALISM ♦ SERVICE

8/9/2021

Acting Director Mahoney:

The Pasco Sheriff's Office (PSO) is in receipt of your correspondence dated August 6, 2021 regarding the Smart Policing Initiative grant awarded to PSO in 2018. After careful review of the letter, we are left confused as to the origins of the concerns and intentions expressed by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). Over the last two years, PSO has been working hand-in-hand with the subject matter experts (SMEs)¹ assigned by BJA to implement this grant. In fulfilling the conditions of the grant, PSO actively collaborates with the BJA-assigned SMEs as well as the University of South Florida (USF) in research partnership and follows all guidance and directives they provide. The written feedback provided by these SMEs included phrases such as "excellent job!" and "the messaging was delivered well," and referenced the "fantastic partnerships" PSO established with the SPI project. Yet for reasons unknown to PSO, your letter directly contradicts the guidance we have been provided over the last two years.

Numerous emails and monthly meetings with the SMEs and USF research partners, as well as the BJA's own guidance regarding Focused Deterrence, demonstrate PSO has appropriately implemented this program, which seeks to reduce victimization, especially as it relates to violent crimes and narcotics-related (opioids) crimes. However, contrary to this guidance and approval, you stated that a letter circulated by PSO, regarding a PSO-run program in cooperation with the Department of Justice's Strategies for Policing Innovation Initiative, did not adequately depict the dedicated training and technical resources under SPI, nor does it adequately describe the requirements for greater community engagement.

Contrary to this assertion, the referenced letter was created in direct consultation with SMEs assigned to the BJA grant. In fact, the letter distributed by PSO was approved by the BJA-assigned SMEs. These SMEs provided PSO with documents as guidelines for drafting the letter and associated video script (addressed later in this response). For example, the Strategies for Policing Innovations Problem-Oriented Guides for Police Response,² which centered on Focused Deterrence of High-Risk Individuals, includes as part of "Phase 3 Notification" suggested wording for notification letters (included as Attachment 1):

Your persistent and serious offending has called you to special attention. The government and the community insist that you stop your offending because it is hurting people and the community. If you are willing to stop, you will be provided with the necessary assistance to create a successful, law-abiding lifestyle for yourself and your family. If you are not willing to stop, you and your criminal associates will be subjected to all available enforcement means to compel you to stop.

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727-847-5878

District II
36409 State Road 52
Dade City, FL 33525
352-518-5000

District III
11530 Trinity Blvd
Trinity, FL 34655
727-372-5920

Pasco Detention Center
20101 Central Blvd
Land O' Lakes, FL 34637
813-996-6982

PSO relied on their expertise and feedback in creating the letter, and it is consistent with best practices identified by SPI and other Focused Deterrence Programs funded by BJA. It is also similar to letters currently being distributed by several other cities throughout the country that have implemented the Focused Deterrence Policing Strategy. For example, High Point, North Carolina uses a comparable letter (included as Attachment 2), and the template is highlighted in the COPS National Network For Safe Communities Custom Notifications - Individualized Communications in the Group Violence Intervention - by David Kennedy and Michael A. Friedrich (included as Attachment 3).

Through our consultations with the SMEs and USF research partners, PSO also recognized the importance of delivering the message in person with the letter and video, to ensure consistency and fidelity in program implementation. This video was also part of attempting to find innovative ways to implement this program during the COVID-19 pandemic, when in-person messaging opportunities were limited. To this end, PSO utilized agency members who are specifically trained to handle behavioral health and substance abuse issues, have an intimate knowledge of the available community services, and who have a passion and skillset for connecting citizens most in need with wrap-around services. The PSO's Behavior Health Intervention Team (BHIT) was tasked with making these encouraging notifications, voluntary referrals, and connecting identified individuals with a large and coordinated network of community partners. This became an exemplary service delivery model and offered a promising focused deterrence process for other agencies to follow.

While the program has only been recently implemented and has faced resource challenges with COVID-19 restrictions, the acceptance of services and resources in the community and the detention facility has been significant. As we continue to grow our partnerships with academic research collaborators such as USF, and the coordination of services in the community with our new Reentry Unit in the Pasco Detention Center, we will continue to increase our shared effectiveness with a continuum of care, support, and services for individuals transitioning back to the community who make the choice to change their lives. To demonstrate the effectiveness of this program, as of the date of this letter, there are 35 detained individuals who are narcotics and violent repeat offenders. The following services were requested by these individuals:

Employment:	18
Mental health:	24
Substance abuse:	19
Housing:	17
Financial:	18
Education:	18 (*One individual successfully completed his GED while incarcerated; one individual did not pass the TABE test to be eligible for GED classes; two individuals are currently registered for the upcoming TABE test; seven individuals have received information on upcoming GED testing in the detention center; 16 individuals have received BayCare Self-Study booklets)

Additional resources have also been provided based on individual requests.

Twelve of the 35 currently incarcerated narcotics and violent repeat offenders have declined services. Additionally, there are 11 eligible individuals who are not currently incarcerated, and six of them have accepted services.

With respect to the concerns raised in your correspondence regarding community engagement, the letter distributed by PSO describes our agency's commitment to the community to partner with Pasco County Human Resources (HUB model) to ensure access to free and timely resources available throughout the community. The HUB model is a community-integrated response to at-risk, high utilizers and vulnerable populations that has been used across the country. The resources include free social services, mental health and addiction treatment, therapy, housing, education and more to address underlying needs and risk factors.

These opportunities for a new pathway in life are made available through community partnerships with BayCare Behavioral Health, the University of South Florida, PSO's Behavioral Health Intervention Team and more, as these groups aim to identify and connect those most in need with community resources. A list of community resources were provided with the letter and includes important contact information to help navigate all the resources available (included as Attachment 4). Furthermore, as funding allows, we hope to assign civilian case managers to individuals in the program to further enhance the coordination and delivery of services.

Further signifying PSO's confusion over your correspondence, we are in receipt of an email from Thomas Woodmansee, one of the BJA-assigned SMEs to guide administration of this grant, which notes, in relevant part, the "fantastic partnerships [PSO] have established with the Pasco County SPI project" (email included as Attachment 5). As PSO's assigned SME noted, our agency has successfully established and fostered partnerships in our community. The assertion in your correspondence that the letter distributed by PSO does not "adequately describe the requirements for greater community engagement" is completely contrary to the guidance and feedback we have been provided by your SME.

Your correspondence also mentioned your concerns regarding the "methodology used to identify individuals for inclusion in the PSO program; the name of the program; communications about the program; the lack of involvement and communication with the greater community about the program; and the insufficient coordination with relevant law enforcement stakeholder groups." It is of utmost importance to note the PSO program is blind to race, gender, religion, creed, or other identifying factors, and participation is determined **solely** by an individual's criminal history within Pasco County. PSO worked closely with our research partners at the University of South Florida to ensure inclusion in the program was entirely unbiased. The program additionally allows for removal of individuals if they do not reoffend within a two-year period and allows individuals to verify accuracy of selection. In addition, this program seeks to directly connect those who have previously offended on numerous occasions with resources available within our community. At its heart, the program is designed to break the cycle of recidivism. Notably, this approach and identification methodology was approved by the BJA-assigned SMEs in numerous meetings over the course of two years.

Regarding the concerns expressed about the name of the program, the name was provided to BJA during the initial application process and approved by BJA, along with PSO's action plan for implementation. How BJA is now claiming lack of awareness of the name and expressing concerns with such, as BJA has been aware of the name since the very beginning of the grant process is absolutely bewildering. Further, PSO advertised this program on our public website as follows:

In December of 2020, the Pasco Sheriff's Office (PSO), in partnership with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Strategies for Policing Innovations (SPI) Initiative and the University of South Florida (USF), implemented an innovative, grant funded focused deterrence (FD) strategy that aims to identify and address adult narcotic prolific offenders (NPOs) and violent prolific offenders (VPOs) that live and operate in Pasco County. Research reveals that FD programs have resulted in significant decreases in violent crime, gun violence, and drug offending, across multiple evaluative studies. This program is designed to reduce recidivism and encourage positive change in narcotic and violent prolific offenders through enhanced support and increased accountability.

Although the PSO currently has an offender strategy, this initiative provides enhancements and new protocols designed to increase prolific offender strategy effectiveness and efficiency. At this time, these enhancements and new protocols will only apply to identified narcotic and violent prolific offenders. Individuals who meet or exceed the NPO and/or VPO scoring threshold will be contacted on a quarterly basis and offered services by a member of the Behavioral Health Intervention Team. During the initial face-to-face visit, the NPO or VPO will be introduced to the program through the following resources:

- *Notification Letter*
- *Detention Center Resource Guide 2020*
- *2021 Pasco County Resource Guide*
- *Contact Card*

With the assistance of our research partners at USF, an evaluation will be conducted to determine if more widespread application is appropriate in the future. USF will conduct a process evaluation to measure the fidelity of the program, implementation, or level of correspondence between the planned and actual implementation of the program by the Pasco Sheriff's office. USF will also conduct two outcome/impact evaluations using a non-randomized controlled trial (NRCT) experiment and a regression discontinuity (RD) design to measure the effect of the narcotic and violent prolific offender program on multiple agency and individual level outcome measures.

If there were concerns about the methodology, those identified, the communications, name, or any other portion of this program, BJA should have relayed them to PSO prior to BJA approving these components. At the very least, the BJA-assigned SMEs who were involved in this project from the beginning and regularly consulted with PSO and approved this project every step of the way should have advised PSO of any concerns. No such concerns were identified or relayed to PSO by BJA or any of BJA's SMEs prior to August 6, 2021. It is fundamentally unreasonable for BJA to

have provided PSO with approval for all of the components of the program, and now claim to be unaware of or do not approve of program components of which you had direct knowledge from the initial application and throughout the entire process.

Regarding the concerns raised about communications related to the program, as previously noted, the program was explained on the PSO public website and the SPI BJA website. The communication strategy was also discussed in great detail with our assigned SMEs, Public Information Officer, and the media consultant provided by the BJA-assigned SMEs. Contrary to your assertions that PSO did not adequately communicate this program, PSO agreed to and has been promoting positive stories in the local media market, while also highlighting the HUB model as an eventual pathway to this program.

Additionally, PSO sought assistance from the BJA-assigned SMEs for any press releases or other public materials about the Focused Deterrence strategy they could share with our community from other successful programs, such as the aforementioned High Point, North Carolina program. Although this idea was being researched and considered by the BJA-assigned SMEs, no further follow-up or press releases have been provided by our BJA-assigned SMEs. PSO has stood ready to promote this program since the beginning but has received no further guidance or information from our BJA-assigned SMEs despite our requests.

Regarding the concerns noted in your correspondence with communications with other law enforcement partners, PSO has strong partnerships with all of the agencies mentioned by the BJA in its letter. These relationships are solidified through PSO's assignment of task force officers to all of the federal law enforcement agencies mentioned in BJA's correspondence. The task force officers provide a bridge to federal resources when individuals in the program reoffend. We additionally have a longstanding partnership with the United States Attorney's Office and our local State Attorney's Office and have developed a process of accountability with these agencies for those in the program who reoffend. These partnerships were highlighted in PSO's first draft of the notification video provided to the BJA-assigned SMEs. As previously mentioned above, it is important to note the video was an innovative approach to satisfy the call-in approach requirement, to overcome the restrictions and limitations on in-person meetings during the COVID-19 pandemic. This approach was also approved by the BJA-assigned SMEs (included as Attachment 6).

Part of the feedback PSO received on the first submitted video draft from our assigned SME was the video "clearly demonstrated that your LE partners support this are working together." It is also important to note the first draft of the video was revised on the recommendation of the BJA-assigned SMEs regarding the length and general messaging. Specifically, the BJA-assigned SMEs suggested removing reference to other law enforcement partners. It is perplexing how BJA could previously provide accolades to PSO about the program's partnerships with other law enforcement agencies, suggest removing reference to such in the video, and yet now contradict itself and claim there are communication issues with other law enforcement partners. It is beyond comprehension as to how PSO can follow the recommendations of the BJA-assigned SMEs, and now be criticized for doing what was recommended.

PSO has also been active in partnering with our local community regarding this program. In fact, the program was significantly influenced by our community service partners, specifically the HUB

program, which uses pathways, or spokes, to connect people most in need with resources, such as housing, mental health, and substance abuse treatment. The HUB group, comprised of many of our community service partners, meets monthly with the PSO Behavioral Health Intervention Team. The HUB program is completely voluntary and provides access to multiple partners with wrap-around services and is coordinated by a Pasco County Human Services case manager. All data is confidential, and a release of information form is given to citizens before joining and they can request to be removed from the program at any time. Importantly, this HUB group was discussed and approved by our BJA-assigned SMEs as part of ongoing consultation on this program.

Our community partnerships to assist those who have previously offended is not limited to this program. PSO has similar partnership programs between our detention facility and community resources to offer a wide array of services to our inmates, such as 12-step substance abuse programs, religious services, GED educational programs, parenting/life skills classes, employment assistance, community reentry services, domestic violence advocacy programs, trauma informed interventions, cognitive behavioral therapy, and other mental health services. To date, these programs have been incredibly successful, and the Pasco Sheriff's Office is proud of them. As always, we seek to help those who have previously offended and reduce victimization in our community by meeting the needs identified by those who have offended.

With respect to BJA's request for PSO to withdraw the letter distributed to program participants, as previously mentioned, the contents of the letter were discussed with and approved by our BJA-assigned SMEs as a unique and positive way to promote services, while also reminding recipients of the necessary accountability if the individual chose to continue to reoffend. The tone and spirit of the letter was to encourage positive change and demonstrate our strong and continued commitment to support and services and is in line with existing best practices provided by the BJA in numerous attached documents. Unfortunately, too often our members hear stories of individuals who have reoffended solely because they do not believe there is another option, due to their criminal history or lacking support. For instance, they cannot find a job, do not have access to housing or education, or have a substance addiction and cannot afford treatment or help. We believe recidivism can be reduced when those who have offended are connected directly to resources available by our community partners, thus breaking down barriers for successful futures.

PSO is therefore unclear why the letter should be withdrawn, as it was endorsed and approved by BJA-assigned SMEs as part of the Focused Deterrence Strategy, it is similar to other focused deterrence programs currently operating throughout the country, it is in line with guidance provided by the BJA, and it is service-focused with the desire to prevent recidivism.

PSO is disappointed by your August 6th correspondence. It unfortunately appears BJA is acting based on an exaggerated and inaccurate local media report, which was insufficiently researched and was refuted by PSO. It also appears BJA is acting in direct conflict to the previous recommendations and approval of its SMEs, as well as best practices as identified in the attached supporting documents. Contrary to media reports, this program is a well-researched, evidence-based program that follows the guidance of the BJA and the BJA-assigned SMEs who consulted and approved of this project every step of the way. As partners in the larger criminal justice enterprise, we would have expected BJA to take a more circumspect and considered approach to addressing any potential concerns.

Every step of this program was done in consultation and with the approval of BJA-assigned SMEs. We were excited to work with BJA on this innovative, research-driven initiative, and we are extremely disappointed by this abrupt change in direction. BJA has put PSO in an impossible position where BJA and the BJA-assigned SMEs are failing to provide a consistent, clear message as illustrated throughout this response. Accordingly, we are unable to determine how to continue forward with the partnership with your organization on this program. We do believe in the evidence-based premise of Focused Deterrence and remain committed to continuing working together with our academic research partners at the University of South Florida, in this area as well as others. The important collaborative work being done on the effect of traumatic brain injuries with respect to offending, recidivism, as well as other initiatives with our inmates in the detention center and the court system will continue to lead to invaluable advancements in options for services for these individuals, which benefits not only them but our community and our society as a whole.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Chris Nocco
Sheriff, Pasco County, FL

¹ The BJA-assigned SMEs include:

Rachel M. Johnston, PhD, Senior Research Scientist, CNA Corporation, Safety and Security Division, Institute for Public Research; link to biography can be found here: https://www.cna.org/experts/Johnston_R

Kenneth Novak, PhD, Profession of Criminal Justice and Criminology, University of Missouri-Kansas City; link to SPI SME profile can be found here: <https://www.smart-policing.com/about/our-team/ken-novak>

Emma Wohl, Research Assistant, CNA Corporation, Institute for Public Research, Safety and Security Division; link to biography can be found here: https://www.cna.org/experts/Wohl_E

Thomas Woodmansee, Senior Advisor, CNA Corporation, retired law enforcement officer who practiced focused deterrence; link to biography can be found here: https://www.cna.org/experts/Woodmansee_T

² Strategies for Policing Innovations Problem-Oriented Guides for Police Response Guide, Series No. 13, by Michael S. Scott (page 13)