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United States General Accounting Office
Washington, DC 20548

August 17, 2001

The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on the District of Columbia
Committee on Government Reform
House of Representatives

Subject: Criminal Justice Statistics for Washington, D.C., and Other Major Cities

Dear Ms. Norton:

On July 20, 2001, we testified at an oversight hearing—which focused on prisoner releases and reintegration programs—held by the Subcommittee on the District of Columbia, House Committee on Government Reform.¹ Among other matters, we testified that the District, a wholly urban jurisdiction, was perhaps facing greater challenges than most jurisdictions. We noted, for instance, that Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) data as of December 31, 1999, indicated that the District of Columbia's incarceration rate was higher than the rate for either Louisiana or Texas, the jurisdictions with the next highest rates. Also, we noted that a National Institute of Justice (NIJ) report on arrests in urban areas indicated that a high percentage of adult males arrested in the District in 1999 tested positive for at least one type of drug.

Regarding incarceration rates, you commented that it was inappropriate to compare the District with states. You requested that we provide you, within 30 days, statistics comparing Washington, D.C., with other major cities. More specifically, you asked us to compare cities based on incarceration rates and any other relevant category of criminal justice statistics that we presented in our July 20th testimony.

To respond to your request, we contacted researchers in academia and at BJS and NIJ to discuss incarceration rates, and we further analyzed NIJ's report on arrestee drug testing. According to the researchers we contacted, incarceration rates are mainly applicable for comparing states and are not available for comparing cities. Rather, the researchers noted that Crime Index² data compiled by the Federal Bureau

¹*Prisoner Releases: Reintegration of Offenders Into Communities* (GAO-01-966T, July 20, 2001).

²The Crime Index is composed of selected offenses used to gauge fluctuations in the overall volume and rate of crime reported to law enforcement. The offenses included in the Index are (1) the violent

of Investigation (FBI) in its Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program³ generally are the most useful criminal justice statistics for comparing major cities, particularly in reference to public safety issues. Thus, we are presenting Crime Index data in this letter. Also, regarding drug testing of arrestees, we are presenting data for all of the applicable urban sites covered in NIJ's report.

In summary, the following two sections of this report present city-to-city comparisons based on (1) Crime Index data and (2) arrestee drug testing data, respectively.

Crime Index Data by Major City for 1999

Washington, D.C., is one of the nation's major cities, that is, cities with a population of 450,000 or more. For these large cities, we obtained Crime Index data for calendar year 1999, the most recent year for which substantially complete UCR Program information was available. As enclosure I shows, the 1999 Crime Index total rates for these large cities ranged from a high of 10,416 offenses per 100,000 inhabitants in Detroit, Michigan, to a low of 2,944 offenses per 100,000 inhabitants in San Jose, California. For Washington, D.C., the 1999 Crime Index total rate was 8,062 offenses per 100,000 inhabitants.

Arrestee Drug Testing Data by Major City for 1999

In our July 2001 testimony, we said that, according to a recent NIJ report, 69 percent of adult males arrested in the District of Columbia in calendar year 1999 tested positive for at least one type of drug.⁴ Also, we said that this figure was 5 percentage points higher than the median rate (64 percent) of use of any drug among the adult males arrested that year in the 34 urban sites covered by NIJ's report.

To provide a basis for specific comparisons, enclosure II presents data for each of the 34 urban sites. As shown in the enclosure, in 1999, the percentages of arrested adult males who tested positive for at least one type of drug ranged from a high of 76.7 percent in Atlanta, Georgia, to a low of 49.5 percent in San Antonio, Texas.

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crimes of murder and nonnegligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault and (2) the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson.

³The UCR Program is a nationwide, cooperative statistical effort of over 17,000 city, county, and state law enforcement agencies voluntarily reporting data on crimes brought to their attention. According to the FBI, during 1999, law enforcement agencies active in the UCR Program represented nearly 260 million U.S. inhabitants, or 95 percent of the total population as established by the Bureau of the Census.

⁴*Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) Program: 1999 Annual Report on Adult and Juvenile Arrestees* (NCJ 181426, June 2000). ADAM is an NIJ research program that provides planning and policy information on drug use and other characteristics of arrestees in U.S. cities through quarterly interviews of adult and juvenile arrestees in holding facilities. The 1999 program collected data from adult male arrestees in 34 reporting sites. ADAM data consist of arrestees' self-reports regarding their drug use and urinalysis results.

As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this letter until 30 days after its date. At that time, will make copies available to others on request.

If you have any questions about our work, please call me at (202) 512-8777 or Assistant Director, Danny R. Burton, at (214) 777-5600. Other key contributors to this letter were Michael H. Harmond and Ellen T. Wolfe.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie E. Ekstrand". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "L".

Laurie E. Ekstrand
Director, Justice Issues

Enclosures - 2

Enclosure I

Crime Index Data for Major U.S. Cities, Calendar Year 1999

City ^b	Rates (number of offenses per 100,000 inhabitants) ^a			Population ^e
	Crime Index total	Violent crime total ^c	Property crime total ^d	
Detroit, MI	10,416	2,254	8,162	975,020
Dallas, TX	9,616	1,414	8,201	1,091,386
Oklahoma City, OK	9,319	859	8,460	473,772
Seattle, WA	9,165	767	8,397	542,954
Columbus, OH	9,102	855	8,247	673,401
Tucson, AZ	8,992	914	8,079	471,286
Nashville, TN	8,884	1,607	7,276	522,935
Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC	8,830	1,345	7,484	604,931
Memphis, TN	8,368	1,411	6,958	609,851
Portland, OR	8,134	1,237	6,897	508,984
Washington, D.C.	8,062	1,628	6,434	519,000
Chicago, IL	8,060 ^f	1,911 ^f	6,149	2,821,032
Milwaukee, WI	7,929	1,043	6,886	580,899
Phoenix, AZ	7,720	832	6,888	1,225,881
New Orleans, LA	7,677	1,273	6,404	465,828
Fort Worth, TX	7,488	851	6,636	498,883
Philadelphia, PA	7,291	1,605	5,687	1,435,382
Houston, TX	7,271	1,187	6,084	1,812,277
Jacksonville, FL	7,152	1,034	6,117	702,462
Austin, TX	7,145	529	6,616	560,389
San Antonio, TX	6,793	561	6,232	1,130,173
Cleveland, OH	6,743	1,215	5,528	497,903
Boston, MA	6,288	1,302	4,986	557,812
El Paso, TX	5,792	686	5,106	623,888
San Francisco, CA	5,725	866	4,859	756,700
Indianapolis, IN	5,322	1,016	4,306	759,066
Denver, CO	5,256	571	4,685	509,624
Las Vegas, NV	5,185	665	4,520	922,450
Honolulu, HI	4,925	254	4,671	866,566
Los Angeles, CA	4,589	1,283	3,305	3,650,138
New York, NY	4,032	1,063	2,969	7,429,263
San Diego, CA	4,004	598	3,405	1,238,549
San Jose, CA	2,944	581	2,363	875,840

Note: The "Crime Factors" section (pp.iv-v) of the cited source cautions readers that the ranking of cities based on Crime Index figures can lead to simplistic and/or incomplete analyses. The section notes, for instance, that the volume and type of crime occurring from place to place are affected by numerous factors, including economic conditions, specific to each jurisdiction.

^aWe calculated Crime Index rates for each central city by dividing the number of crimes by the population number and then multiplying by 100,000. For instance, the number of crimes reported in 1999 for Detroit was 101,561. We divided 101,561 by 975,020 and multiplied the resulting quotient by 100,000 to arrive at a Crime Index total rate for Detroit of 10,416 offenses per 100,000 inhabitants.

^bThe cities listed are those with a population of 450,000 or more (see note e) and for which UCR Program data were available for 1999. According to the FBI, due to data problems, Baltimore, MD (population of 632,681), was not included in the FBI report cited in the source statement below.

^cViolent crimes include murder and nonnegligent homicide, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

^dProperty crimes include burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft. According to the FBI, sufficient data were not available to estimate totals for arson.

^ePopulation data are Bureau of the Census provisional estimates as of July 1, 1999, and are subject to change. With the exceptions of Las Vegas and Charlotte-Mecklenburg, the estimates are for the central city and do not include the entire metropolitan statistical areas. Las Vegas and Charlotte-Mecklenburg include data reported to the FBI from police jurisdictions expanding beyond the central city.

^fAccording to the FBI, instances of forcible rape are not included in the Crime Index total and the violent crime total rates for Chicago because rape figures furnished by the Illinois Department of State Police were not in accordance with national UCR Program guidelines.

Source: GAO calculations based on UCR Program data reported by the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI in *Crime in the United States 1999*, tables 6 and 8.

Enclosure II

**Percentage of Arrested Adult Males (by ADAM Program City)
Who Tested Positive for Drug Use, Calendar Year 1999**

ADAM Program city	Percent of arrested adult males who tested positive for at least one type of drug
Atlanta, GA	76.7
New York, NY	74.7
Chicago, IL	74.4
Cleveland, OH	71.0
Philadelphia, PA	69.8
New Orleans, LA	69.2
Washington, D.C.	68.9
Sacramento, CA	68.3
Tucson, AZ	68.0
Denver, CO	66.8
Miami, FL	66.0
Seattle, WA	65.9
Detroit, MI	65.3
Phoenix, AZ	64.4
Oklahoma City, OK	64.2
Indianapolis, IN	64.1
Albuquerque, NM	63.9
Birmingham, AL	63.8
Fort Lauderdale, FL	63.8
Portland, OR	63.8
San Diego, CA	63.8
Los Angeles, CA	62.4
Spokane, WA	62.1
Omaha, NE	61.5
Dallas, TX	60.5
Minneapolis, MN	60.4
Salt Lake City, UT	60.3
Las Vegas, NV	59.6
Houston, TX	59.5
Laredo, TX	58.3
Des Moines, IA	56.0
San Jose, CA	55.4
Anchorage, AK	53.8
San Antonio, TX	49.5

Note: According to NIJ, although most ADAM sites are known by the name of the largest local city, the catchment area of most sites encompasses substantially larger geographic areas than the urban center. The standard catchment area is the county. NIJ anticipates that the ADAM network eventually will expand to a total of 75 sites to cover the largest U.S. cities (i.e., cities with populations of 200,000 or more, or the largest city in states without a population center of more than 200,000 inhabitants).

Source: NIJ, *Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) Program: 1999 Annual Report on Adult and Juvenile Arrestees* (NCJ 181426, June 2000).

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