Bureau of Justice Statistics



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Survey of State Records Included in Presale Background Checks: Mental Health Records, Domestic Violence Misdemeanor Records, and Restraining Orders, 2003

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Overview

Federal law prohibits the transfer of a firearm to several categories of individuals, including those who have been committed to a mental institution, have been adjudicated as mentally ill, are the subject of a domestic violence restraining order, or have been convicted of a domestic violence misdemeanor (18 USC § 922(g)).

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) conducted a special survey of State repository directors to examine the quality and availability of State records for these categories of individuals. The Survey of State Records Included in Presale Firearm Background Checks: Mental Health Records, Domestic Violence Misdemeanor Records, and Restraining Orders, 2003 was conducted between October 2002 and February 2003 to supplement the information that BJS provides as part of its Firearm Inquiry Statistics (FIST) project.

Some of the highlights from the survey are summarized below.

Mental health records

Fourteen States do not have the ability to access mental health records for purposes of a background check at the time of a firearms purchase.

Among States that are capable of checking records of mental commitments, 24 States and the District of Columbia utilize court records for such checks.

In most States, court records are the primary source for data on those found not guilty by reason of insanity or incompetent to stand trial. Common reasons given by States for not accessing mental health records directly were; the lack of interface between the checking agency and the agency maintaining the database, mental health records that are incomplete or not automated, the inability to positively identify a person in mental health records, and State privacy laws that prohibit access.

Records for misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence

Fourteen States and the District of Columbia do not have the ability to check records for misdemeanor convictions for domestic violence because such records are either incomplete or not fully automated.

An additional eight States indicated that flags are needed on the conviction transactions to identify the conviction as a domestic violence incident.

Nine States indicated that resource constraints inhibited the identification of such offenders, and seven States indicated that the Federal definition of relevant domestic violence convictions was problematic.

Protection orders

Fifteen States indicated that their records of protection orders are either incomplete or not fully automated and eighteen States indicated that they do not forward all of their protection order information to the FBI for inclusion in the National Protection Order file because of incompleteness or lack of automation.

Twenty-seven States indicated that court record systems were the primary location for obtaining information on the imposition of protection orders.

Methodology

This survey is part of the ongoing BJS project, Firearm Inquiries Statistics (FIST), which is conducted by the Regional Justice Information Service (REJIS) of St. Louis, Missouri. BJS and REJIS jointly developed the survey instrument in September 2002, and REJIS mailed it to all 50 States and the District of Columbia in October 2002.

The 39 States that have a "checking agency" (an agency that conducts background checks for firearm sales, purchase permits, or exempt carry permits) received a survey with 13 questions, including questions about the checking agency. The 11 States that do not have a "checking agency" received a survey with nine questions on the status of their records. By February 2003 all 50 States and the District of Columbia had returned the survey to REJIS.

Table 1. Whether State agencies that conduct background checks for firearm transfers have access to mental health records and procedures used, by State, 2003

	State agency does not access mental health records			Phone or e-mail Other	
	access mental fieldin fecolus	DaidDase	Manual Check	TIONE OF E-Mall	Uner
Alabama	х				
Alabama Alaska	^				
Alaska Arizona		х			
Arkansas	х	^			
California	~	х			
Colorado	х	~			
		v			
Connecticut		X X			
Delaware	- lu una la lia	X			
District of C					
Florida	Х	V			
Georgia		Х			
Hawaii	X	Х			
Idaho	Х	v			
Illinois	X	Х			
Indiana	Х				V
lowa ^a					Х
Kansas					
Kentucky					
Louisiana					
Maine					
Maryland		Х			
Massachus	etts			Х	
Michigan		Х			
Minnesota		Х	Х		
Mississippi					
Missouri	Х				
Montana	Х				
Nebraska		Х			
Nevada				Х	
New Hamps	shire X				
New Jersey		Х			
New Mexico)				
New York ^b		Х			Х
North Caroli	ina		Х		
North Dakot	ta X				
Ohio					
Oklahoma					
Oregon		Х			
Pennsylvan	ia	Х			
Rhode Islan					
South Carol					
South Dako					
Tennessee	Х				
Texas			х		
Utah		х			
Vermont					
Virginia		Х			
Washington		X	х	х	
West Virgin				~	
Wisconsin	~	Х			

^a In Iowa there is no formal method to examine mental health information; however, some mental health information is

contained in court records. ^b In New York the database of individuals committed to a mental institution is checked prior to a pistol permit application and not a NICS check.

Table 2. State agencies responsible for updating databases accessed during firearm checks with information that
an individual was committed to a mental hospital, by State, 2003

	Courts	Public mental health facilities or professionals	Private mental health facilities or professionals	No State agency	Other
Alabama		Х	Х		
Alaska	Х				
Arizona	Х				
Arkansas				Х	
California	Х	x	Х		
Colorado	Х				
Connecticut	Х				
Delaware		х	Х		
District of Columbia	Х				
Florida				Х	
Georgia	Х				
Hawaii	Х				
Idaho				х	
Illinois	Х	х	Х		
Indiana				х	
Iowa				х	
Kansas				х	
Kentucky				х	
Louisiana					
Maine					
Maryland				х	
Massachusetts	х			A	
Michigan	x				
Minnesota	x	х			
Mississippi	~	~			
Missouri	х	х			
Montana	x	~			
Nebraska	X	х	х		
Nevada	х	~	~		
New Hampshire	~			х	
New Jersey ^a	х			^	х
New Mexico ^b	^				X
New York				х	^
North Carolina				x	
North Dakota					
				x	
Ohio Oklahoma ^c				х	
Oregon ^d					Х
					Х
Pennsylvania ^e	Х				Х
Rhode Island	Х				
South Carolina	Х				
South Dakota	х				
Tennessee				х	
Texas				Х	
Utah	Х				
Vermont				Х	
Virginia	Х				
Washington	Х				
West Virginia				Х	
Wisconsin	х				
Wyoming	Х				

^a The Department of Human Services provides this information.

^b Courts and prosecutors provides this information.
 ^c Prosecutors submit this information. Records from the State Department of Mental Health are checked as part of the application for a concealed handgun license.
 ^d This information is provided by the mental health database maintained by the Department of Human Services.

^e This information is provided by judges and county mental health officials.

	Courts	Prosecutors	No State agency	Other	
Alabama	х				
Alaska	х				
Arizona	х				
Arkansas	х				
California	х				
Colorado	х				
Connecticut ^a				х	
Delaware	х				
District of Columbia	х				
Florida	х				
Georgia	х				
Hawaii	х				
Idaho			Х		
Illinois	х				
Indiana	х				
Iowa	х				
Kansas		Х			
Kentucky ^b				х	
Louisiana ^c				Х	
Maine	Х				
Maryland			Х		
Massachusetts	Х				
Michigan	Х				
Minnesota	Х				
Mississippi					
Missouri	Х				
Montana	х				
Nebraska	Х				
Nevada	х				
New Hampshire			Х		
New Jersey	х				
New Mexico	х	Х			
New York			Х		
North Carolina			Х		
North Dakota			Х		
Ohio	х				
Oklahoma		Х			
Oregon	x				
Pennsylvania	x				
Rhode Island	x				
South Carolina	Х				
South Dakota Tennessee	Х		х		
Texas	х		^		
Utah	x				
Vermont	X				
Virginia	x				
Washington	X	х			
West Virginia	x	~			
Wisconsin	x				
Wyoming	x				
,					

Table 3. State agencies responsible for updating databases accessed during firearm checks with information that an individual was adjudicated "not guilty by reason of insanity," by State, 2003

^a The Psychiatric Security Review Board is responsible for submitting this information.

^b Law enforcement officers are required to report dispositions on all persons charged.

^c The Department of Corrections is responsible for submitting this information.

	Courts	Prosecutors	No State agency	Other
Alabama			х	
Alaska	Х			
Arizona	Х			
Arkansas	Х			
California	Х			
Colorado	Х			
Connecticut				
Delaware	х			
District of Columbia	х			
Florida	х			
Georgia	X			
Hawaii	x			
Idaho	~		Х	
Illinois	х		A	
Indiana	~		Х	
lowa	Х		~	
Kansas	^	х		
		^		N/
Kentucky ^a				Х
Louisiana				
Maine	х			
Maryland			Х	
Massachusetts	Х			
Michigan	Х			
Minnesota	Х			
Mississippi				
Missouri	Х			
Montana	Х			
Nebraska	Х			
Nevada	Х			
New Hampshire			Х	
New Jersey	Х			
New Mexico	Х	Х		
New York			Х	
North Carolina			Х	
North Dakota			Х	
Ohio	Х			
Oklahoma		Х		
Oregon				х
Pennsylvania	Х			
Rhode Island	Х			
South Carolina	х			
South Dakota			Х	
Tennessee			X	
Texas	х			
Utah	x			
Vermont	x			
Virginia	x			
Washington	X	х		
West Virginia	X	^		
Wisconsin	X			
Wyoming	X			
vvyonning	^			

Table 4. State agencies responsible for updating databases accessed during firearm checks with information that an individual was found incompetent to stand trial, by State, 2003

^a Law enforcement officers are responsible for submitting this information.

Table 5. State agencies responsible for updating databases accessed during firearm
checks with information that an individual was adjudicated as mentally ill, by State, 2003

	Courts	No State agency	Other	
Alabama	х			
Alaska	Х			
Arizona	х			
Arkansas	х			
California ^a	Х		х	
Colorado	х			
Connecticut		Х		
Delaware	х			
District of Columbia	Х			
Florida		Х		
Georgia	Х			
Hawaii	Х			
Idaho		Х		
Illinois	Х			
Indiana		Х		
lowa		Х		
Kansas ^b			Х	
Kentucky ^c			Х	
Louisiana				
Maine	х			
Maryland	Х			
Massachusetts	Х			
Michigan	Х			
Minnesota	Х			
Mississippi				
Missouri	Х			
Montana	Х			
Nebraska	Х			
Nevada	Х			
New Hampshire		Х		
New Jersey New Mexico ^d	Х			
New York ^e	Х	N.	x	
North Carolina		X X	х	
North Dakota				
Ohio		X X		
Oklahoma ^f		X	х	
Oregon			x	
Pennsylvania	х		~	
Rhode Island	x			
South Carolina	x			
South Dakota	x			
Tennessee	~	х		
Texas		x		
Utah	х	~		
Vermont	~	х		
Virginia	х	~		
Washington ^g	X		х	
West Virginia	~	х	~	
Wisconsin		x		
Wyoming	х			
J - J				

^a Public and private mental health facilities are responsible for submitting this information.

^b The prosecutors are responsible for submitting this information.

 $^{\rm c}\,$ Law enforcement officers are responsible for submitting this information.

 $^{\rm d}\,$ This information is part of the criminal history file.

Courts share this responsibility with prosecutors for criminal proceedings.

^f In New York, checks of individuals committed to a mental institution are conducted prior to a pistol permit application and not a NICS check.

^g For criminal cases only, prosecutors are responsible for submitting this information in the case disposition.

^h Prosecutors are responsible for submitting this information.

Table 6. Reasons why State agencies that conduct background checks for firearm transfers do not access complete and accurate mental health information, by State, 2003

		Condition of menta No interface between					
		checking agency and		Lack biometric	Limited agency		
	Not fully automated	records database	Are incomplete	identifiers	resources	Limited time	Privacy law
Alabama							
Alabama							
Alaska							Х
Arizona	Х						
Arkansas		Х					
California				Х			
Colorado		Х			Х	х	х
Connecticut							Х
Delaware							
District of Columbia	Х	Х					
Florida	Х	Х		Х	Х	х	
Georgia							
Hawaii			Х				х
Idaho	Х	Х		Х			
Illinois			х				
Indiana							
lowa	х	х	х	х			
Kansas	~	~		~			
Kentucky							
Louisiana							
Maine							
Maryland	х						х
Massachusetts	x				х		x
	~		х			v	~
Michigan Minnesota	X	N.	X	N.	x	X X	
	х	Х		Х	х	X	
Mississippi		N.					
Missouri		Х			x		Х
Montana	Х	Х		Х	Х		
Nebraska		Х		х		х	
Nevada		Х			х	х	Х
New Hampshire							х
New Jersey	Х			Х			
New Mexico							
New York							Х
North Carolina	Х	Х	Х	х	х	х	х
North Dakota	Х	Х		х	х		х
Ohio							
Oklahoma							
Oregon							
Pennsylvania	Х	Х	Х	х			
Rhode Island							х
South Carolina		х		х	х		X
South Dakota							
Tennessee	х	Х		х			х
Texas	x	x		x	х	Х	x
Utah	A	~		~	~	~	x
Vermont							~
Virginia							
Washington	v	v		×			
washington Weet Virginie	х	Х		х			
West Virginia							
Wisconsin		х		Х			X X

Table 7. Reasons why complete and accurate mental health information is not reported to the FBI, by State, 2003

	Condition of mental health records		Agency		
	Not fully automated	Are incomplete	Lack biometric identifiers	lacks resources	Privacy laws
Alabama					Х
Alaska					Х
Arizona					
Arkansas	Х				
California					Х
Colorado	X				×.
Connecticut	Х		×		Х
Delaware	X		X		
District of Columbia			X		
Florida	х		Х	х	
Georgia					Х
Hawaii		Х			Х
Idaho	Х	х	Х	х	
Illinois	Х	х			Х
Indiana	Х				
lowa	Х		Х		
Kansas	Х		Х		
Kentucky	Х		Х		Х
Louisiana					
Maine	Х				х
Maryland	Х				Х
Massachusetts	Х				Х
Michigan		Х			
Minnesota	Х	х	Х	х	х
Mississippi					
Missouri	Х			Х	Х
Montana	Х		х	х	
Nebraska	Х		Х	х	х
Nevada	Х			х	х
New Hampshire					х
New Jersey					
New Mexico					
New York					х
North Carolina	Х	Х		х	х
North Dakota	Х		х	Х	х
Ohio	Х	Х			х
Oklahoma	Х		х		х
Oregon					
Pennsylvania					х
Rhode Island					х
South Carolina	Х				х
South Dakota	Х	Х	x		х
Tennessee	Х				Х
Texas	Х		Х	х	Х
Utah	Х			х	
Vermont	Х			х	х
Virginia					
Washington	х		Х		
West Virginia	х				Х
Wisconsin	х		х		Х
Wyoming					х

Table 8. State sources of domestic violence misdemeanor information, by State, 2003

	Court records	Criminal history records
Alabama		Х
Alaska		Х
Arizona	Х	Х
Arkansas		Х
California	Х	Х
Colorado	Х	Х
Connecticut		Х
Delaware	Х	Х
District of Columbia		Х
Florida	х	X
Georgia		X
Hawaii	х	X
Idaho	~	x
Illinois	х	x
Indiana	X	X
lowa	x	x
	^	X
Kansas	V	~
Kentucky	X	
Louisiana	Х	
Maine		X
Maryland		Х
Massachusetts	Х	
Michigan		X
Minnesota		Х
Mississippi		
Missouri	Х	Х
Montana		Х
Nebraska	Х	Х
Nevada	Х	Х
New Hampshire	Х	Х
New Jersey	Х	Х
New Mexico	Х	Х
New York	Х	
North Carolina	Х	Х
North Dakota		
Ohio	Х	
Oklahoma	X	х
Oregon	X	x
Pennsylvania	X	x
Rhode Island	X	x
South Carolina	~	Â
	х	X
South Dakota	^	
Tennessee	V	X
Texas	x	X
Utah	X	X
Vermont	X	X
Virginia	X	Х
Washington	Х	Х
West Virginia		Х
Wisconsin	Х	X
Wyoming		Х

 Table 9. Reasons why checking agencies that conduct background checks for firearm transfers do not access complete and accurate domestic violence misdemeanor information, by State, 2003

		Iomestic violenc				Endoral definition
	Are incomplete	Are not fully automated	Lack flags	Too few resources	Limited time	Federal definition is confusing
Alabama						
Alaska	Х	Х				
Arizona						
Arkansas			х			
California			~			
Colorado	х					
Connecticut	Л			Х		
Delaware			х	^		
District of Columbia		v	~			
	v	х				
Florida	Х					
Georgia						
Hawaii			.,			
Idaho			х			Х
Illinois	Х					
Indiana			х	Х	Х	
lowa	Х					
Kansas						
Kentucky						
Louisiana						
Maine						
Maryland						
Massachusetts						
Michigan			Х	Х	Х	Х
Minnesota	Х		х		х	Х
Mississippi						
Missouri	Х		х	Х		
Montana		х				Х
Nebraska	х	X			х	X
Nevada	x	X			x	~
New Hampshire	Х				~	
New Jersey						
New Mexico						
			v			
New York			х			
North Carolina			N/			
North Dakota			Х			
Ohio						
Oklahoma						
Oregon						
Pennsylvania						
Rhode Island						
South Carolina						
South Dakota						
Tennessee	Х		Х			
Texas		Х		Х	Х	Х
Utah	Х	Х	X X			
Vermont						
Virginia	х					Х
Washington						~
West Virginia						
Wisconsin						
Wyoming						

		ic violence misdemea		Agency lacks		
	Not fully automated	Are incomplete	Lack flags	resources	is confusing	
Alabama	х	х	Х			
Alaska			Х			
Arizona						
Arkansas						
California						
Colorado						
Connecticut	Х					
Delaware			Х			
District of Columbia						
Florida						
Georgia						
Hawaii						
Idaho			Х		Х	
Illinois		Х				
Indiana			Х			
Iowa		Х				
Kansas	Х	Х	Х	Х		
Kentucky			Х			
Louisiana	Х		Х			
Maine	Х					
Maryland						
Massachusetts		Х	Х			
Michigan		Х	Х			
Minnesota		Х				
Mississippi						
Missouri		Х	Х	Х		
Montana	Х					
Nebraska	Х	Х		Х	Х	
Nevada		Х	Х			
New Hampshire						
New Jersey						
New Mexico		Х		Х		
New York			Х			
North Carolina						
North Dakota			х			
Ohio			Х			
Oklahoma						
Oregon						
Pennsylvania						
Rhode Island						
South Carolina						
South Dakota			Х		Х	
Tennessee		Х	Х			
Texas	Х		Х			
Utah		Х	Х			
Vermont						
Virginia		Х			Х	
Washington						
West Virginia			Х	Х		
Wisconsin						
Wyoming						

Table 10. Reasons that complete and accurate domestic violence misdemeanor information is not reported to the FBI, by State, 2003

Table 11. Sources of restraining order information, by State, 2003

	Court records	Criminal history records
Alabama	Х	
Alaska		
Arizona	Х	Х
Arkansas		Х
California		
Colorado	Х	
Connecticut	Х	Х
Delaware	Х	Х
District of Columbia		Х
Florida		
Georgia		
Hawaii	Х	х
Idaho		
Illinois	Х	
Indiana	Х	
lowa		
Kansas		
Kentucky	Х	
Louisiana	Х	
Maine	Х	
Maryland	Х	
Massachusetts	X	
Michigan		х
Minnesota		
Mississippi		
Missouri	Х	
Montana		
Nebraska		
Nevada		Х
New Hampshire	Х	x
New Jersey	X	X
New Mexico	~	
New York	х	
North Carolina	^	
North Dakota		
Ohio		
	V	
Oklahoma	X	X
Oregon	Х	Х
Pennsylvania	V	X
Rhode Island	Х	Х
South Carolina	V	
South Dakota	Х	
Tennessee	N.	
Texas	X	
Utah	X	
Vermont	Х	
Virginia		
Washington	Х	
West Virginia	X	
Wisconsin	Х	
Wyoming		

	Condition of restraining orders				
	Are not fully automated	Are incomplete	Too few resources	Limited time	
Alabama					
Alaska					
Arizona					
Arkansas					
California					
Colorado		Х		Х	
Connecticut		Х			
Delaware					
District of Columbia					
Florida					
Georgia					
Hawaii	Х				
Idaho					
Illinois		Х			
Indiana					
Iowa					
Kansas					
Kentucky					
Louisiana					
Maine					
Maryland					
Massachusetts					
Michigan		х			
Minnesota		X			
Mississippi					
Missouri	х	х	Х		
Montana	~	A	~		
Nebraska	х	х			
Nevada	~	^			
		v			
New Hampshire		х			
New Jersey					
New Mexico					
New York					
North Carolina	N N	V			
North Dakota	Х	Х			
Ohio Oklahama					
Oklahoma					
Oregon					
Pennsylvania	.,		.,		
Rhode Island	Х	X	Х		
South Carolina		Х			
South Dakota					
Tennessee		Х	Х	Х	
Texas	Х				
Utah		Х			
Vermont					
Virginia					
Washington	Х				
West Virginia					
Wisconsin					
Wyoming					

 Table 12. Reasons why checking agencies that conduct background checks for firearm transfers do not access complete and accurate restraining order information, by State, 2003

Table 13. Reasons that complete and accurate restraining order information is not reported to the FBI, by State, 2003 $\,$

	Restraining orders are not fully automated	Restraining orders are incomplete
Alabama	Х	
Alaska		
Arizona		
Arkansas		
California		
Colorado		Х
Connecticut		
Delaware		
District of Columbia		
Florida		
Georgia		
Hawaii		
Idaho		
Illinois		Х
Indiana		
Iowa		
Kansas		
Kentucky		
Louisiana		Х
Maine	Х	
Maryland		
Massachusetts		
Michigan		
Minnesota		
Mississippi		
Missouri	Х	Х
Montana		
Nebraska	Х	Х
Nevada		
New Hampshire		Х
New Jersey		
New Mexico	х	
New York		
North Carolina		
North Dakota	х	Х
Ohio	x	
Oklahoma	X	Х
Oregon		
Pennsylvania		
Rhode Island	Х	Х
South Carolina		X
South Dakota		
Tennessee		Х
Texas	Х	x
Utah		X
Vermont		~
Virginia		
Washington		
West Virginia	х	
Wisconsin	Λ	
Wyoming		
vvyonning		