Data Sharing Improvement for the Dane County Sheriff's *Inmates* Website
July 2, 2020

Introduction

The Dane County Sheriff's office has made great strides in data sharing by providing inmate information through their *Inmates* website: https://danesheriff.com/inmates.

This information is updated daily. It includes offender names, judicial status, building, booking number, booking date, arrest, and case information. This information is useful in determining jail census, building utilization, and helping families or advocates identify location and charges of inmates.

There are a number of updates that can be made to this data exchange to improve how the information is shared with the community, streamline reporting and proactively address request for reports, and ultimately reduce racial disparities in our criminal justice system. Providing aggregated data will help identify short- and long-term trends and facilitate better decision-making by policymakers and staff, informed by the public. These suggestions are not requesting additional data but rather taking the existing data and providing it in a useful, consistent, complete and accurate format.

Suggested Improvements

Improvement #1: Develop and Publish Daily Summary Data

The *Inmates* website should provide daily historical summary data including the following:
- Daily census count
- Count of inmates per building
- Count of inmates by judicial status

In the future, this can be updated to include additional demographic information, average length of stay, and other metrics. These daily metrics should be provided either to the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) for distribution or available directly on the Inmates website.

The screen shots below will show where this information can be found on the Inmates website.

Daily Census Count:
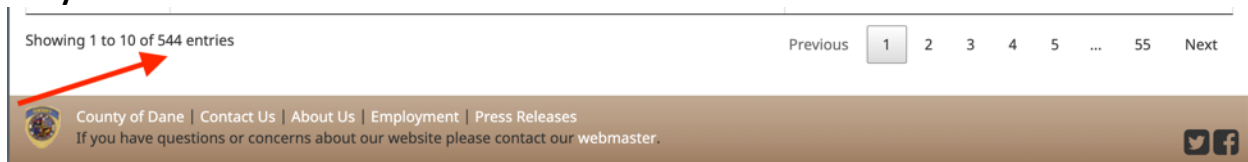
Judicial Status and Building Inmate is housed in:

INMATE DETAIL

Name	
Status	CO Pretrial
Building	PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING
Area	P4A
Scheduled Release	N/A
Booking Number	547647
Booking Date	1/16/2020 7:14 PM
Name Number	636315

To the right is a simple example of what this report can look like. CJCC currently uses Tableau (a data visualization software) so they have the capability to provide many useful visualizations of this data:

The data should be presented in a daily snapshot. In the future it can include relevant comparison data elements including previous day, annual average to date, comparison to one month prior, and comparison to one year prior. However, if this raw data is provided, the community will be able to undertake projects like this.

JUDICIAL STATUS	6/11/20	6/12/20	6/15/20
CO Prearr/Probation	29	29	29
CO Prearraignment	24	12	20
CO Prearraignment/Hold			
CO Pretrial	68	69	67
CO Pretrial/Hold	19	19	19
CO Pretrial/Prob Hold	52	53	55
E.S. Sanct w/out work release		1	1
Federal Prisoner Intransit	69	67	66
Muni Prearraignment	1	1	
Non Fed Prisoner Intransit	8	4	5
P/P Viol/Outside Hold	2	2	2
P/P Violation (Hold)	68	67	68
Presentence Invest	19	19	19
Presentence Invest/Hold	4	4	3
Prob Sent/Work Rel Revoked	7	7	7
Prob Sentence/No Work Release	1	1	1
Sentenced Huber Revoked	7	7	7
Sentenced W/O Huber	2	2	2
Sentenced/Outside Hold	3	2	2
State Prisoner Intransit	59	59	61
State Prisoner Writ			
INMATES PER FACILITY	**6/11/20**	**6/12/20**	**6/15/20**
Public Safety Building	200	200	200
City County Building	100	100	100
Outside	142	125	134
Census Count	**442**	**425**	**434**

Improvement #2: Make Data available using Application Programming Interfaces (API) in addition to the website

The *Inmates* website is a highly useful tool to capture a snapshot of the jail population as well as look up specific inmate info. However, when trying to identify long-term trends or gather a historical perspective of jail utilization, it can be improved. The Sheriff's office can make this information using Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) such as SOAP or Rest/JSON. The data provided would be the same as the current *Inmates* website so there would be no additional security concerns since the data is exactly the same but accessed in a more technically-friendly manner.

Using APIs allows a computer to directly acquire this information using a computer-to-computer interface rather than a human-to-computer interface. Local groups have used the existing website to try to aggregate this data by using a process called 'screen scraping'. 'Screen scraping' is where a programmer directly parses the website HTML code to try to pull this information. There are a number of deficiencies including:

- If the website changes, the screen scraping program needs to be rewritten, causing inefficiencies and the potential for user error.
- The programmer must guess what the data is rather than having a well-defined data model that is properly documented.

The US Department of Justice specifically recommends the use of APIs in their Enterprise Information Sharing goals (*Develop principles, requirements, standards, and guidance for information sharing, emphasizing the use of application programming interface (API) technology – US DOJ,* Data Strategy for the U.S. Department of Justice).

The county clerk's office had a similar technical challenge after the 2018 gubernatorial primary. They wanted to provide elections data using an API rather than having news agencies 'screen scrape' their website to get elections results. They were able to quickly provide an API for elections data that was fast, efficient, and useful to the community. The technical details and documentation can be found here: https://api.countyofdane.com/help.

Similar technology can be leveraged here and there could potential to re-use or learn from code that is already written and in production.

These adjustments would help ensure that policymakers, the public, and other stakeholders have the information they need to make decisions to advance equity and justice goals. These changes would also facilitate proactive reporting, reducing the burden on staff to respond to individual inquiries with various priorities.