

A Briefing on the Regional Gang Intelligence Database (RGID)

Prepared by the Policing in Chicago Research Group at UIC

May 2019

In response to community demands for public accountability and for a responsible process of abolition that provides restitution to people harmed by the database, the **Policing in Chicago Research Group** at the University of Illinois at Chicago carried out an evaluation of RGID. We analyzed two partial versions of the RGID database (from June 2018 and January 2019), CCSO policies and procedures, data-sharing agreements with hundreds of external agencies, and thousands of pages of internal communications of the CCSO leading up to the decision to decommission the database. These are our key findings and the questions that remain.

Regional Gang Intelligence Database

- When RGID was decommissioned in January 2019, the database contained information on **26,144** adults. More than 1000 people were added to the list from June 2018 to January 2019, an average of **5 adults every day**.
- But RGID is potentially much larger. We know that there are also **people under 18** on RGID, but we do not know how many. The data that CCSO released only includes people who are currently over 18. But some of these people were entered into the database when they were as young as 14 or 15. *How many people were added to the database before they turned 18? And how many people under 18 are currently on the database?*
- RGID also includes people who are currently in their 80s and 90s. Many of them were added to the list as recently as 2018. And, as reported by ProPublica, hundreds of individuals on RGID are listed as “deceased.” *How does a person in their 90s end up on the gang database? And what is the purpose of tracking people who are no longer alive?*
- Among the people whose race is identified on RGID, **84% are people of color**.

Criteria for Inclusion

- Unlike the Chicago Police Department, the CCSO maintained a clear set of policies and criteria for adding names to RGID. Officers were instructed to identify at least two criteria (out of five) that justified adding a person to the database. And police departments were required to retain supporting documents for every person they added to the list.
- Despite these protections, we have questions about each of the five criteria used to designate people as gang members.
 - “Admitted membership in a criminal gang.”
 - *Under what conditions did these confessions take place? How were they documented?*
 - “Identified by an individual of proven reliability as a criminal gang member.”
 - *Who were these “individuals of proven reliability”? Did these individuals receive any training to identify people as gang members?*
 - “Arrested in the company of known criminal gang members for offenses which are consistent with criminal gang activity.”

- *How many people were added to the database without charges? Without convictions?*
- “Possesses tattoos that a trained law enforcement officer or agent has reasonable suspicion to believe signify gang membership.”
 - *Under what conditions were these tattoos inspected? How were people’s civil rights protected?*
- “Resides in or frequents a particular criminal gang’s area or affect their style of dress, use of hand signs, symbols, or maintain an ongoing relationship with known criminal gang members, and where the law enforcement officer documents reasonable suspicion that the individual is involved in criminal gang-related activity or enterprise.”
 - *Did the emphasis on “residing in or frequenting” an area effectively criminalize entire blocks or neighborhoods? Did the criminalization of “ongoing relationships” violate constitutional rights to association?*

Data Sharing and Access

- In response to FOIA requests, CCSO provided a list of over 300 local, state, and federal agencies with access to RGID. But the list was not complete. We now know that more than **367 local, state, and federal agencies** had access to RGID.
- **Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)** was not on the list provided by CCSO. But new documents reveal that ICE also had access to RGID. *Why did CCSO exclude ICE from the list they provided of agencies with access to RGID?*
- Moreover, CCSO was **actively expanding the number of agencies with access to the database**. During December 2018 and January 2019, the CCSO signed MOUs with several new agencies and issued dozens of new user accounts for RGID. And two new user accounts were created on January 14, 2019 – the day before the database was decommissioned. *Why was the CCSO actively expanding access to RGID at a time when they were preparing to either transfer the database to another agency or terminate the database entirely? Were new users able to download, print, or save the database?*

Other Issues with RGID

- **Due process:** Individuals were not notified when their names were added to RGID and there was no process for appealing or correcting gang designations.
- **Incomplete purging:** Unlike the Chicago Police Department, CCSO established a policy of “purging” old entries from RGID if an individual on the list had no police involvement for five years. But the process of “purging” old entries did not mean that the information would be permanently deleted. Instead, it would be moved to an “archive” and could be moved back to the active RGID database if the person was arrested again.
- The **consequences of inclusion** on RGID include increased harassment from law enforcement, targeted immigration enforcement, impacts on bail, bond, and sentencing decisions, and barriers to employment and housing.

Decommissioning the Database

- When CCSO asked if other agencies were interested in hosting RGID, **multiple agencies expressed interest in acquiring the database** – including Chicago Police Department, Maywood PD (IL), Portage PD (IN), Wheeling PD (IN), Griffith PD (IN), Indianapolis PD, Indiana Fusion Center, Indiana University Police, and the Canada Border Services Agency. *What happened with the expressions of interest in hosting RGID? Was the RGID database or any data from RGID transferred to these or other agencies?*
- The **Mid-States Organized Crime Information Center (MOCIC)**, part of a federal data-sharing initiative that maintains the nationwide **RISSGang Database**, expressed an interest in acquiring RGID and encouraged agencies that previously used RGID to transition to RISSGang. *Did the CCSO transfer RGID to MOCIC? Did the CCSO apply for access to the RISSGang Database?*
- After the CCSO decided to decommission the database, CCSO received multiple **requests to download Excel versions** of the database before it was destroyed. According to one request, RGID was “designed with that capacity on the back end.” *How many agencies had the ability to download Excel versions of RGID? Did anyone from CCSO download the data into an Excel sheet? And how many agencies have access to these Excel files?*
- On January 15, 2019, RGID was taken offline and stored on **two encrypted hard drives** in a CCSO vault. Earlier reports about encrypted hard drives did not specify that there are two drives.

Abolition and Accountability

- In February 2019, the Cook County Board unanimously approved an ordinance that ensures the permanent destruction of RGID, prohibits the Sheriff’s Office from sharing gang designations in the future, and requires public hearings about the gang database and its impact. Yet questions remain about the CCSO’s relationship to other local and federal gang databases.
- *How does the CCSO share gang designations with the CPD?* The recent report by the City of Chicago Office of the Inspector General documented that CCSO is the external agency that most frequently uses the CPD gang database. *Does CCSO enter gang designations into the CLEAR system? How many entries in the CPD’s CLEAR database are based on information collected from detainees at the Cook County Jail?*
- *What other regional and national gang databases does the CCSO share information with?* For instance, the RISS maintains the nationwide RISSGang Database, the FBI’s National Gang Intelligence Center maintains a database sourced from local data, and the FBI’s National Crime Intelligence Center oversees a massive database of crime data accessible to law enforcement agents across the country. *Does CCSO share gang designations with any of these or other databases?*
- The CCSO insists that it will continue to interview detainees at Cook County Jail and to gather information about gang affiliation. *How is this data being stored? What external agencies have access to this data?*

For further information, contact Dr. Andy Clarno, Coordinator of the Policing in Chicago Research Group at aclarno@uic.edu.

