



A nonprofit organization improving justice through leadership and service to courts

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Improving Security in State Courthouses Ten Essential Elements for Court Safety

**NCSC and Partners Announce National Summit on Court Safety and Security
Attendees to include Local, State, and Federal Decision Makers**

Atlanta Shootings Put Emphasis on Action and Increased Funding

Washington, DC – March 16, 2005 - A new security blueprint for America's state courts emphasizing critical review of operating procedures and facilities, planning, funding, and new courthouse design was released by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) at the National Press Club.

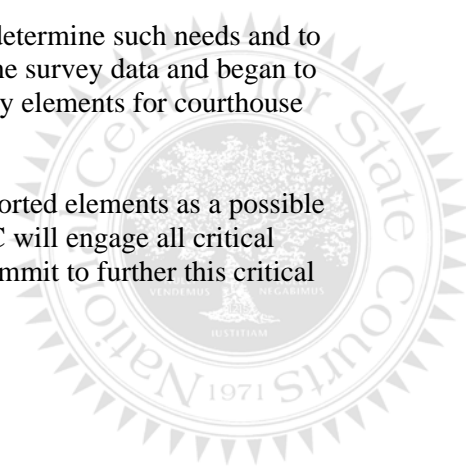
In addition to presenting the Ten-Point blueprint, NCSC also announced plans today for a National Summit on Court Safety and Security. The National Summit will bring together all members of the court community to provide a mechanism for reviewing current safety and security practices and needs. This effort will result in a strategic action plan that will draw from a compilation of best practices and will provide the mechanism for identifying resource and funding needs.

"The National Center for State Courts is committed to ensuring that our partnership with the entire stakeholder community results in the development of effective safety and security measures for our courts." Stated Mary McQueen, President National Center for State Courts. "With the commitment of resources from the U.S. Department of Justice, our community has support that can only further our efforts on behalf of America's courts."

As an outcome of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and in response to urgent mandates from states to review all safety and security considerations across state operations, The National Center for State Courts convened the Joint Committee on Security and Emergency Preparedness, comprised of members from the Conference of Chief Justices (CCJ) and Conference of State Court Administrators (COSCA) to consider safety and security issues of America's courts.

In October 2003 the Joint Committee conducted a state-by-state survey to determine such needs and to begin identifying effective practices. The Joint Committee had compiled the survey data and began to frame solutions through the identification of ten essential safety and security elements for courthouse safety and security planning.

The National Center for State Courts is today presenting those survey-supported elements as a possible framework for the full development of court security strategies. The NCSC will engage all critical stakeholders in further defining state plans, and will convene a National Summit to further this critical effort.



Essential Ten Elements for Effective Courtroom Safety and Security Planning

1. Operational Security: Standard Operating Procedures

This is one of the most critical deficiencies in the state court system today. Standard Operating Procedures are not being following and for full safety, there needs to be 100 percent compliance.

2. Facility Security Planning: The Self-Audit Survey of Court Facilities

This point emphasizes the need to know the strengths and weaknesses of the physical structure of the courtroom to best protect the people inside.

3. Emergency Preparedness and Response: Continuity of Operations

At any moment, courts can be affected by natural or unnatural disasters; however, they must continue to operate and serve the public in such an event. There needs to be a greater awareness and identification of command structure, protocols, and communication routes for such emergencies and responses.

4. Disaster Recovery: Essential Elements of a Plan

The point emphasizes the need to ensure that adequate procedures are in place to recover lost or vulnerable information in the event of an emergency.

5. Threat Assessment

The federal government currently has an effective threat assessment protocol in practice. However, for security and safety purposes, state courts need to begin identifying serious threats so they may prepare for the proper protective action.

6. Incident Reporting

States must develop an appropriate incident report form that allows for capturing data on items such as intelligence and funding needs.

7. Funding

This is another critical deficiency facing the court system today and for years past. Equipment can be bought at moderate costs but without the trained personnel, the equipment is of little to no use. In addition, many state court administrators are troubled by the lack of federal funds. While much money is appropriate to homeland security, very little is dedicated to state courts.

8. Security Equipment and Costs

State courts must have updated and readily available information on what technology is available to them and how much it costs.

9. Resources and Partnerships

Strong and effective partnerships among state courts, law enforcement, and county commissioners must be developed to ensure successful security operations.

10. New Courthouse Design

As new courthouses are being constructed, this point emphasizes the opportunity to ensure that up-to-date physical safety measures are included in the design stage.

More About The National Center for State Courts

The mission of NCSC is to improve the administration of justice through leadership and service to state courts, and courts around the world. NCSC disseminates information to state court leaders on key national policy issues, and helps advocate their policies with Congress as well as supporting several prestigious national organizations.

More on The National Summit

The NCSC has secured support and participation of Members of Congress, Department of Justice officials, and state and county court officials as well as members from public safety and state and local governments in the National Summit. President Mary McQueen, who has been a strong and vocal leader of the state court community has promised her members and the communities they serve that the outcome of the Summit will not only provide best practices for improving safety and security, but will use the power of its participants to call for necessary funding to implement such plans.