

Warrant Disposition Study

At the specific request of the Cincinnati Police Division Vera staff examined current practices for processing and serving criminal and traffic warrants to determine whether or not changes in present procedures could result in a more effective and efficient operation.

Based on an analysis of the type and number of warrants received and present methods used to dispose of them, two pilot projects using a letter notification was set up by Vera staff to test whether a mailing system would be an efficient way to clear a substantial number of warrants. Following are the preliminary results which indicate that notifications mailed to 322 citizens with unpaid traffic violations in Districts 6 and 7 resulted in a higher clearance rate than the Division's current practices.

-More than 11 percent (36 persons) paid the fines outstanding. This is equal to the present rate obtained by warrant men who were in the field.

-More than 37 percent (120 individuals) went to a District station to schedule a court appearance (by receiving a NTA). Of the 62 individuals scheduled to appear by August 28, 60 (97%) showed up; two did not. At present 7 percent of traffic warrants are cleared by issuing NTAs.

-In nearly 10 percent of the cases, police obtained updated information on the defendant's whereabouts which would enable police to improve the chance of serving a warrant.

The 322 letter pilot cost an estimated \$.41 a unit, a figure that could be reduced if the mailing were done on a larger scale. Costs included postage, stationery, reproduction and labor.

At present, ten sworn officers aided by the equivalent of five clerks are assigned to warrant service and processing on the District level. They cost the Division approximately \$203,000 a year to handle 127,000 warrants, at an average cost of \$1.59 a warrant.

The following chart shows that warrants for traffic violations (67.6%) represent the bulk of the warrant service workload. The analysis is based on a survey of warrants received between April and June this year in Districts 4, 5 and 7, which are representative of the Division as a whole:

CHART 1

<u>Type Warrant</u>	<u>Percentage (and Number) of Total Received</u>	
Criminal Misdemeanor	13.9%	( 411)
Criminal Capias (Misdemeanor charge)	4.7	( 138)
Traffic (Moving Violation)	11.1	( 328)
Traffic (Parking violation)	56.5	(1,666)
Traffic Capias	13.8	( 408)
Total	100.0	(2,951)

As can be seen from Chart II, these warrants were cleared in several ways. Nineteen percent of the parking warrants were cleared by the defendant either paying the outstanding fine or appearing in court (NTA arrest); few cases required physical arrest. Sixteen percent of the warrants for moving violations resulted in payment

of fine or court appearance.

Approximately 30 percent were either "disposed" of by transfer to another District (where they may be served, but no records were available) or simply held at the District "pending" service later and creating a backlog.

Nearly half the traffic warrants received, however, were unable to be served and were subsequently entered into the Division's Computer (RCIC).

In contrast, more than half (52.6%) of the criminal warrants result in a NTA being issued or a physical arrest and do not represent as serious a problem for the Division.

CHART II

WARRANT DISPOSITION SUMMARY

<u>Disposition Method</u>	<u>Criminal</u>	<u>Traffic-Moving</u>	<u>Traffic-Parking</u>
Physical arrest	3.6%	1.2%	0.2%
Cited-NTA	48.0	5.8	7.0
Paid Out	n.a.	8.5	11.7
Transfer-Misc.	19.0	15.3	12.6
Pending	7.8	15.6	20.1
Returned "Unable"	21.4	53.6	48.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

In an attempt to improve the rate of traffic warrant clearance by either payment of fine or appearance in court, two pilot tests were developed. Using District 6 and 7, the first test was designed to test whether or not citizens would respond at all to a mailed notification that a warrant had been issued for them.

A total of 322 letters were mailed to individuals in eight beats, four in each District, which contained a representative cross-section of a District's residents. Warrants were selected randomly from among those that were part of a District's backlog, none of which had been served, nor had any of the addresses been verified.

As shown in Chart III, more than half the defendant's responded by paying their fine, surrendering at the District or scheduling a court appearance. (Of the 62 scheduled for court prior to August 28, 60 appeared.)

In addition to the warrants cleared in these ways, ten percent of the letters resulted in further information on the defendant's whereabouts -- joined the armed services, moved out of town, died -- that offered a good chance for disposition.

The post office returned a portion (17.7%) where the addressee was unknown with no forwarding address. In 21 percent there was no response, and would require warrant officer follow-up.

CHART III

DISPOSITION - - TEST ONE MAILING

<u>Disposition</u>	<u>Warrants Moving</u>		<u>Warrants Parking</u>		<u>Total Warrants</u>	
Paid Out	9	12.3%	27	10.8%	36	11.2%
Cited - NTA	20	27.4	100	40.2	120	37.3
Physical Arrest	1	1.4	5	2.0	6	1.9
Other	8	10.9	23	9.2	31	9.6
Transferred	0	0	5	2.0	5	1.5
Returned- "Unable"	17	23.3	40	16.1	57	17.7
No Response	<u>18</u>	<u>24.7</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>19.7</u>	<u>67</u>	<u>20.8</u>
Total	73	100%	249	100.0%	322	100%

The mailing technique helped focus warrant officer work by eliminating the "most servable" warrants and spotlighting those which required more follow-up.

The second test emphasized positive response by defendants stressing payment of fines rather than scheduling a court date. Results of this test which began August 21 are not yet complete. However, as of

August 28, 23 percent of the 235 individuals contacted by letter paid out fines as compared with the current rate of 11 percent and 12 percent received NTAs for court appearance. Complete results will be available in early September.

If the final results of this pilot support the findings established to date, Vera would recommend that the Division consider the following:

- development of a Division-wide notification procedure to all defendant's requesting them to pay outstanding fines or schedule a court appearance (by obtaining a NTA).

- creation of a central processing unit to provide more efficient administrative back-up to District personnel responsible for warrant service.

Prior to any change in current practice, on a Division-wide basis, however, a four week test should be run in one District to work out actual operating procedures. This test could be done in either District 6 or 7 where commanders and warrant officers are familiar with the pilot demonstrations.

Although adoption of these recommendations may not result in an actual decrease in the manpower assigned to warrant service, their acceptance should result in more warrants served as well as more cleared.

Vera staff would monitor such a test to insure that practices and procedures adopted are workable and to help solve problems which arise.

The central processing unit recommended would be established to:

-prepare daily summaries for each District of all warrants and capiases sent to them. Preparation of a master list of traffic and criminal warrants for each district would eliminate the need for logging in warrants now assigned to clerks there and which duplicate the work done at Central Station.

-enter all returned "unable" warrants into the computer. At present each district enters warrants into the computer. Each district uses different formats and defines the items of information differently, which has resulted in many entry errors and name duplications. Centralizing this process would not only reduce the amount of clerical time now required on the District level (more than 50 percent of all warrants are returned "unable"), but also provide the ability to standardize the computer entry format and information entered.



-perform certain investigation functions on warrants where the defendant has left Hamilton County, died, or where the potential for serving the warrant is small. The first test indicated that 10 percent of the letters general information which requires contact with the coroner, armed services, etc., for verification. This function could be easily centralized.

Whatever changes the Division makes in its current warrant service practice, an assessment procedure also should be established. Districts should report weekly during the initial stages of a new project on the number and type of warrants received and the method of disposition -- paid out, returned "unable", transferred, etc.

Vera staff will prepare the procedures required for such a unit, estimates of staffing requirements and job descriptions for staff. In addition to these suggestions, Vera suggests the Division request that the court clerk's office obtain more information on warrants issued on the basis of a citizen's complaint. The information collected should be part of the procedure for obtaining a warrant and includes: the defendant's sex, race, last known address, phone, place of employment, This information would help district officers serve these warrants.