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Report of the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts

on Applications for Orders Authorizing or Approving the Interception of Wire, Oral, or Electronic Communications

The Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 requires the Administrative Office of the United States Courts (AO) to report to Congress the number and nature of federal and state applications for orders authorizing or approving the interception of wire, oral, or electronic communications. The statute requires that specific information be provided to the AO, including the offense(s) under investigation, the location of the intercept, the cost of the surveillance, and the number of arrests, trials, and convictions that directly result from the surveillance. This report covers intercepts concluded between January 1, 1997, and December 31, 1997, and provides supplementary information on arrests and convictions resulting from intercepts concluded in prior years.

From 1996 to 1997, the total number of intercepts authorized by federal and state courts increased 3 percent to 1,186, primarily due to growth in applications involving the surveillance of narcotics operations (up 6 percent). Following a 9 percent increase in 1996, the number of applications for orders by federal authorities declined slightly by 2 percent in 1997. The number of applications by state prosecuting officials increased 9 percent over last year. The number of federal intercept applications authorized has grown substantially over the last 10 years, increasing 141 percent from 1987 to 1997. In contrast, state applications have increased 41 percent since 1987. The number of intercepts employed in drug-related investigations also has undergone significant growth. Drug offenders were targeted in 870 of the interceptions concluded in 1997, compared to 379 in 1987, a 130% increase.

The appendix tables of this report list all intercepts reported by judges and prosecuting officials for 1997. Appendix Table A-1 shows reports filed by federal judges and federal prosecuting officials. Appendix Table B-1 presents the same information for state judges and state prosecuting officials. Appendix Tables A-2 and B-2 contain information from the supplementary reports submitted by prosecuting officials about additional arrests and trials in 1997 arising from intercepts initially reported in prior years.

Title 18 U.S.C. Section 2519(2) mandates the submission of wiretap reports no later than January 31 of each year. This office, as is customary, sends a letter to the appropriate officials every year reminding them of the statutory mandate. Nevertheless, each year reports are received after the deadline has passed. Although the number of missing state and local prosecutors' reports was lower in 1997 compared to 1996, the number of reports that were either late or not submitted for this year's report remains higher than usual. The AO is grateful for the cooperation and the prompt responses we received from other officials around the nation.

Leonidas Ralph Mecham
Director

April 1998

Applications for Orders Authorizing or Approving the Interception of Wire, Oral, or Electronic Communications

Reporting Requirements of the Statute

Each federal and state judge is required to file a written report with the Director of the Administrative Office of the United States Courts (AO) on each application for an order authorizing the interception of a wire, oral, or electronic communication (18 U.S.C. 2519(1)). This report is to be furnished within 30 days of the denial of the application or the expiration of the court order (after all extensions have expired). The report must include the name of the official who applied for the order, the offense under investigation, the type of interception device, the general location of the device, and the duration of the authorized intercept.

Prosecuting officials who applied for interception orders are required to submit reports to the AO no later than January 31 on all orders that were terminated during the previous calendar year. These reports contain information related to the cost of the intercept, the number of days the intercept device was actually in operation, the total number of intercepts, and the number of incriminating intercepts recorded. Results such as arrests, trials, convictions, and the number of motions to suppress evidence related directly to the use of intercepts are also noted.

Neither the judges' reports nor the prosecuting officials' reports contain the names, addresses, or phone numbers of the parties investigated. The AO is **not** authorized to collect this information.

This report tabulates the number of applications for interceptions that were granted or denied, as reported by judges, as well as the number of authorizations for which interception devices were installed, as reported by prosecuting officials. No statistics are available on the number of devices installed for each authorization.

No report to the AO is required when an order is issued with the consent of one of the principal parties to the communication. Examples of such situations include the use of a wire interception to investigate obscene phone calls; the interception of a communication to which a police officer or police informant is a party; the use of a body microphone; or the use of only a pen register (a mechanical device attached to a telephone line to record on paper tape all numbers dialed from that line).

Regulations

The Director of the AO is empowered to develop and revise the reporting regulations and reporting forms for collecting information on intercepts. Copies of the regulations, the reporting forms, and the federal wiretapping statute may be obtained by writing to the Administrative Office of the United States Courts, Statistics Division, Washington, D.C. 20544.

The Attorney General of the United States, the Deputy Attorney General, the Associate Attorney General, any Assistant Attorney General, any acting Assistant Attorney General, or any specially designated Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Criminal Division of the Department of Justice may authorize an application to a federal judge for an order authorizing the interception of wire, oral, or electronic communications. On the state level, applications are made by a prosecuting attorney "if such attorney is authorized by a statute of that State to make application to a State court judge of competent jurisdiction. . . ."

Many wiretap orders are related to large-scale criminal investigations that cross county and state boundaries. Consequently, arrests, trials, and convictions resulting from these interceptions often do not occur within the same year as the

installation of the intercept device. Under 18 U.S.C. 2519(2), prosecuting officials must file supplementary reports on additional court or police activity that occurs as a result of intercepts reported in prior years. Appendix Tables A-2 and B-2 describe the additional activity reported by prosecuting officials in their supplementary reports.

Table 1 shows that 45 jurisdictions (the federal government, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and 42 states) currently have laws that authorize courts to issue orders permitting wire, oral, or electronic surveillance. During 1997, a total of 24 jurisdictions used at least one of these three types of surveillance as an investigative tool.

Summary and Analysis of Reports by Judges

Data on applications for wiretaps terminated during calendar year 1997 appear in Appendix Tables A-1 (federal) and B-1 (state). The reporting numbers used in the appendix tables are reference numbers assigned by the AO; these numbers do not correspond to the authorization or application

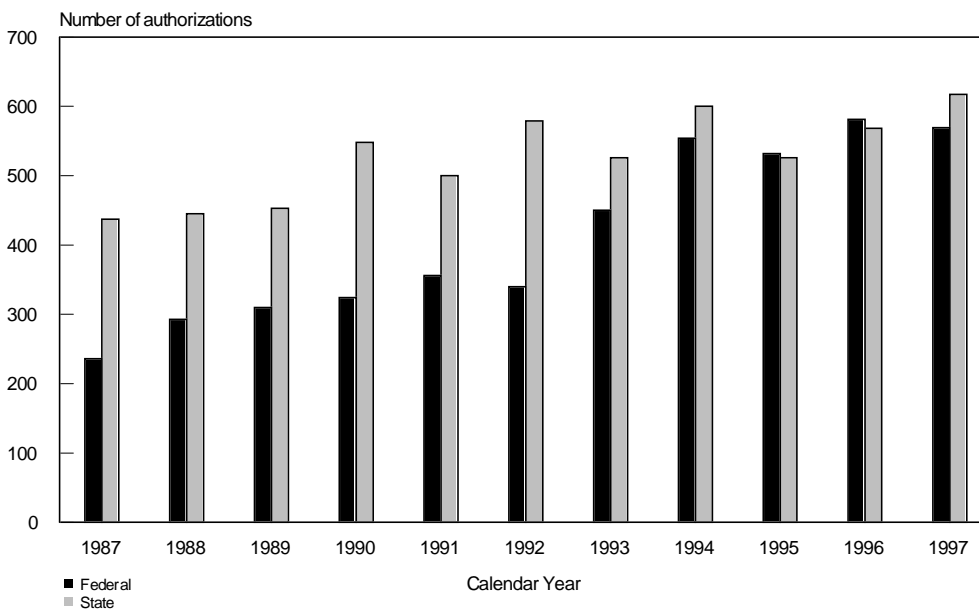
numbers used by the reporting jurisdictions. The same reference number is used for any supplemental information reported for a communications intercept in future volumes of the *Wiretap Report*.

A total of 1,186 applications were authorized in 1997, an increase of 3 percent from 1996. Judges approved all applications. A total of 569 applications were approved by federal judges in 1997, a decline of 2 percent over the previous year. The 2 percent decrease in federal applications in 1997 follows a 9 percent increase in 1996. Approvals of applications by state judges increased 9 percent to 617. Wiretap applications in New York (304 applications), New Jersey (70 applications), and Florida (57 applications) accounted for 70 percent of all authorizations approved by state judges.

Authorized Length of Intercepts

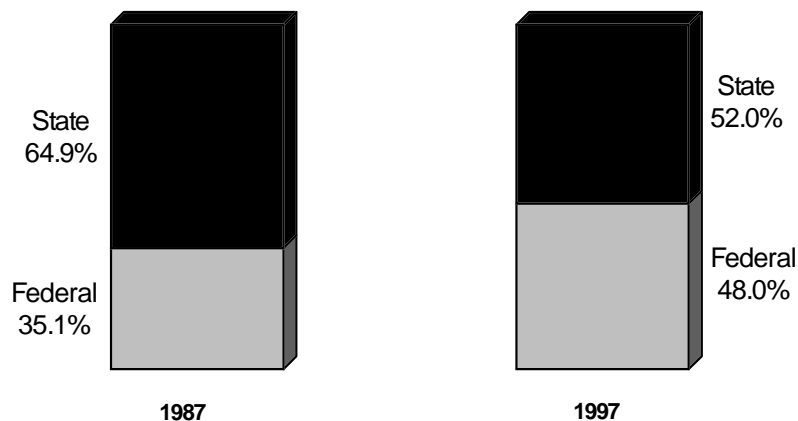
Table 2 presents the number of intercept orders issued in each jurisdiction that provided reports, the number of amended intercept orders issued, the number of extensions granted, the average length of the original authorizations and

Federal and State Wiretap Authorizations



Federal and State Wiretap Authorizations

Percent of Total Authorizations



their extensions, the total number of days the intercepts were actually in operation, and the nature of the location where each interception of communications occurred. Most state laws limit the period of surveillance under an original order to 30 days. This period, however, can be lengthened by one or more extensions if the authorizing judge determines that additional time for surveillance is warranted.

During 1997, the average length of an original authorization was 28 days, the same as the average length for an extension. A total of 1,028 extensions were requested and authorized in 1997, up 16 percent from last year. The wiretapping of a digital display pager to investigate a narcotics operation in Arizona led to the longest federal intercept. The original 30-day order was extended 14 times to complete the 430-day investigation. The longest state intercept occurred in Queens, New York, where a 540-day larceny investigation required a 30-day order to be extended 17 times. In contrast, 43 state intercepts were each in operation for less than a week.

Location

The most common location for the placement of wiretaps in 1997 was a "single-family dwelling," a type of location that includes houses, rowhouses, townhouses, and duplexes. Table 2 shows that in 1997 a total of 23 percent (273

wiretaps) of all intercept devices were authorized for single-family dwellings; 9 percent (108 wiretaps) were authorized for apartments; and 7 percent (78 wiretaps) were authorized for business establishments such as restaurants and hotels. Since the enactment of the Electronic Communications Privacy Act of 1986, a specific location need not be cited in a federal application if the application contains a statement explaining why such specification is not practical or shows that the person under investigation is purposely thwarting an investigation by changing locations (see 18 U.S.C. 2518 (11)). In these cases, prosecutors use "roving" wiretaps to target a specific person rather than a specific telephone or location. For the 1997 report, federal authorities reported that they employed "roving" wiretaps for one extortion operation in the District of Massachusetts and for three narcotics investigations located in the Eastern District of New York, the Southern District of New York, and the Eastern District of Virginia. On the state level, eight roving wiretaps were used: one in New Jersey for a gambling investigation, and two in Illinois, four in New York, and one in Wisconsin for narcotics operations. Forty-five percent of intercept applications (529 applications) specified "other" locations. Applications specifying other locations, which include mobile telephones, electronic pagers, and cellular telephones, have been increasing in recent years with the proliferation of

these types of communication devices. During the 1990s, the percentage of applications designating other locations for the placement of intercepts has grown twofold, and over the last 10 years has shown a fivefold increase. Combinations of locations were cited in 16 percent of federal and state applications (185 applications) in 1997.

Offenses

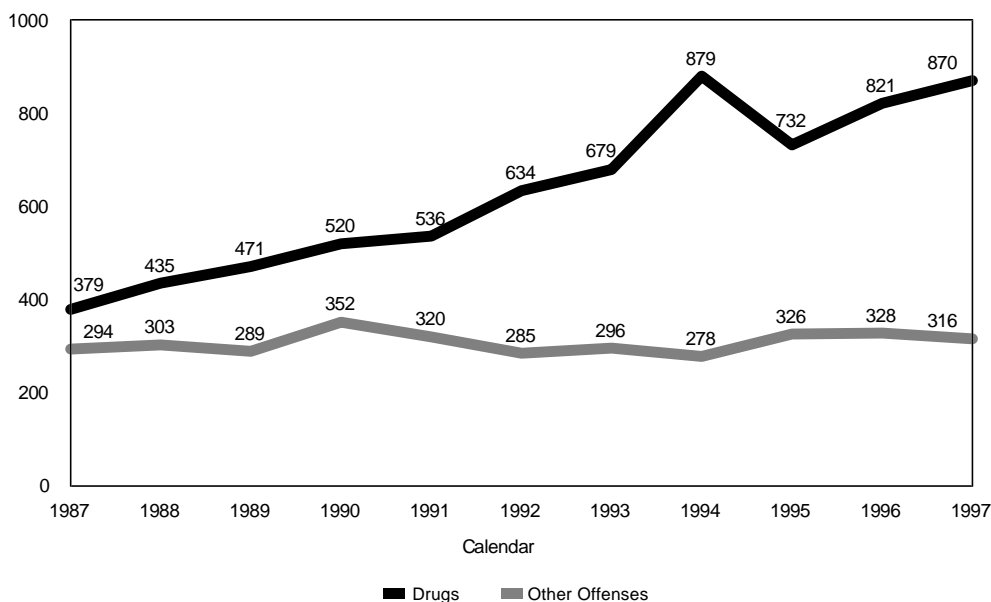
Violations of narcotics laws remain the most prevalent types of offenses investigated through communications intercepts. Table 3 indicates that 73 percent of all applications for intercepts (870 cases) authorized in 1997 cited “narcotics” as the most serious offense under investigation. Many applications for court orders indicated several criminal offenses under investigation, but Table 3 includes only the most serious criminal offense named in an application. The use of federal intercepts to conduct drug investigations was most common in the Central District of California (59 applications). On the state level, the New York City Special Narcotics Bureau conducted the most drug investigations in 1997, with the number of authorizations obtained for drug-related intercepts more than doubling from 78 in 1996 to 161

in 1997. Nationwide, gambling (98 applications) and racketeering (93 applications), which were the next most frequently cited offenses after narcotics, were each cited in 8 percent of intercept applications as the most serious offenses under investigation in 1997.

Summary and Analysis of Reports by Prosecuting Officials

In accordance with 18 U.S.C. 2519(2), prosecuting officials must submit reports to the AO no later than January 31 of each year for intercepts terminated during the previous calendar year. Appendix Tables A-1 and B-1 contain information from all prosecutors’ reports submitted for 1997. Judges submitted 73 reports for which the AO received no corresponding reports from prosecuting officials. For these authorizations, the phrase “No Prosecutor’s Report” appears in the appendix tables. Some of the prosecutors’ reports may have been received too late to include in this report, and some prosecutors delayed filing reports to avoid jeopardizing ongoing investigations. Information received after the reporting

Drugs as the Major Offense



deadline will be included in next year's *Wiretap Report*.

Nature of Intercepts

Of the 1,186 communication interceptions authorized in 1997, a total of 1,094 intercept devices actually were installed. Table 4 presents information on the average number of intercepts per order, the number of persons whose conversations were intercepted, the total number of communications intercepted, and the number of incriminating intercepts. Wiretaps varied extensively with respect to the above characteristics. The average number of interceptions per day in 1997 ranged from 0 to nearly 400. The most active federal intercept occurred in the Southern District of New York, where a 47-day narcotics investigation resulted in an average of 422 interceptions per day. For state authorizations, the most active investigation was a 20-day gambling operation by the New York Organized Crime Task Force that produced an average of 396 intercepts per day. Nationwide, in 1997 the average number of persons whose conversations were intercepted per order in which intercepts were installed was 197. The average number of conversations intercepted was 2,081 per wiretap, 20 percent of which produced incriminating evidence (418 intercepts).

Table 6 presents the type of surveillance device used for each intercept installed. The most common method of surveillance was the telephone wiretap, which accounted for 69 percent (756 cases) of intercepts installed in 1997. Electronic devices such as digital display pagers, voice pagers, cellular phones, and electronic mail constituted 19 percent (206 cases) of intercept devices installed; microphones were used in 3 percent of intercepts. A combination of devices was involved in 9 percent of intercepts (97 cases).

Costs of Intercepts

The average cost of intercept devices remained stable relative to last year; the average cost of an intercept order in 1997 was \$61,176. Table 5, which provides a summary of expenses related to intercept orders in 1997, reflects the cost of installing intercept devices and monitoring communications for the 1,029 authorizations for which reports included cost data. For federal wiretaps for which expenses were reported in 1997, the aver-

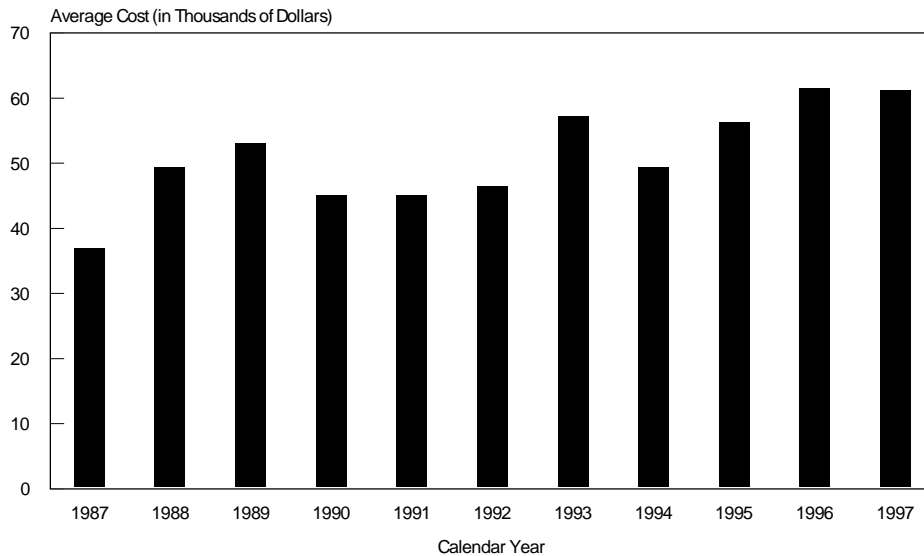
age cost increased 1 percent to \$82,107. The average cost of a state wiretap rose 3 percent to \$37,137 in 1997. For additional information, see Appendix Tables A-1 (federal) & B-1 (state).

Arrests and Convictions

Federal and state prosecutors often note the importance of electronic surveillance in obtaining arrests and convictions. For example, a federal wiretap in the District of Columbia led to the conviction of all 15 persons arrested. Prosecutors commented that the intercepts in this narcotics investigation were "instrumental in providing direct evidence to convince defendants to enter plea agreements and cooperate with the government." A federal wiretap in the Southern District of California resulted in the seizure of 1,874 kilograms of cocaine and \$1,343,000 in cash, and led to the conviction of 9 of the 16 persons arrested. On the state level, the District Attorney's Office in Bronx County, New York, noted that "the interceptions led to the arrest and indictment of numerous individuals who would otherwise have evaded arrest and prosecution." Of the 28 persons arrested in this 110-day narcotics operation, 21 persons were convicted. A state intercept in Mesa County, Colorado, led to the conviction of 10 of the 14 persons arrested. Prosecutors reported that "without the interceptions there would not have been sufficient information to prosecute the main targets for the racketeering charges which included the full scope of their operation."

Table 6 presents the numbers of persons arrested and convicted as a result of interceptions terminated in 1997. As of December 31, 1997, a total of 3,086 persons were arrested based on electronic surveillance activity, 25 percent more than in 1996. A total of 542 persons were convicted in 1997, representing a conviction rate of 18 percent, slightly lower than the 1996 conviction rate of 20 percent. Federal wiretaps were responsible for the majority of convictions in 1997 (54 percent). A two-week wiretap of an apartment in the District of Columbia produced the most convictions of any single federal intercept in 1997. This narcotics investigation resulted in the conviction of all 15 persons arrested. The most effective state intercept in terms of the number of convictions occurred in Queens County, New York, where the State Attorney's Office re-

Average Cost of Wiretaps



ported that a single intercept led to the conviction of 25 of the 41 persons arrested in this narcotics investigation. Because criminal cases involving the use of electronic surveillance may still be under active investigation, the results of many of the intercepts concluded in 1997 may not have been reported. Prosecutors will report the costs, arrests, trials, motions to suppress evidence, and convictions related directly to these intercepts in future supplementary reports, which will be noted in Appendix Tables A-2 or B-2 of subsequent volumes of the *Wiretap Report*.

Summary of Reports for Years Ending December 31, 1987 Through 1997

Table 7 provides a historical summary of information on intercepts reported from 1987 to 1997. The table specifies the number of intercept applications requested, denied, authorized, and installed, and the number of extensions granted; the average length of original orders and extensions; the locations of intercepts; the major offenses investigated; average costs; and the average number of persons intercepted, communications intercepted, and incriminating intercepts. From 1987 to 1997, the number of intercept applications authorized increased 76 percent (up 513

applications). The majority of wiretaps involved drug-related investigations, ranging from 56 percent of all applications authorized in 1987 to 73 percent in 1997. The average number of incriminating intercepts remained relatively stable, increasing slightly from 36 percent of intercepts installed in 1987 to 38 percent in 1997.

Supplementary Reports

Under 18 U.S.C. 2519(2), prosecuting officials must file supplementary reports on additional court or police activity occurring as a result of intercepts reported in prior years. Because many wiretap orders are related to large-scale criminal investigations that cross county and state boundaries, supplementary reports are necessary to fulfill reporting requirements. Arrests, trials, and convictions resulting from these interceptions often do not occur within the same year in which the intercept was first reported. Appendix Tables A-2 and B-2 provide detailed data from all supplementary reports submitted.

During 1997, a total of 1,762 arrests, 2,352 convictions, and additional costs of \$2,421,992 resulted from wiretaps completed in previous years. Table 8 summarizes additional prosecution activity by jurisdiction for intercepts terminated in the years noted. Most of the additional activity reported in 1997 involved wiretaps terminated in

1996. Intercepts concluded in 1996 led to 61 percent of arrests, 47 percent of convictions, and 93 percent of expenditures reported in 1997 for wiretaps terminated in prior years. Table 9 reflects the total number of arrests and convictions result-

ing from intercepts terminated in calendar years 1987 through 1997.

