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## Offender Records Retention Analysis

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## Offender Records Retention Analysis

The purpose of my project is to review the S.C. Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services' procedure for the retention and retrieval of offender records. The Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services is facing the problem of running out of space for storage of the closed offender files. The Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services must decide how long it will keep these records. The area in which the files are stored is very expensive office space and the best use of the space needs to be maximized. In order to develop a solution for the problem, we must first take a look at the current process from the records through the process to which they are stored. ( See Appendix A) The Deployment Flow Chart shows the very detailed process from creation to the storage and destruction of the record.

The offender file or record is created in the county that the offender is sentenced and/or supervised. The storage process does not start until the offender's file is closed by the supervising county. The county initiates the storage process by preparing the file storage. The Administrative Staff in the county office will remove the all documents from the offender file that is not to be stored. Documents that are kept for storage are original court orders, indictments, certificates of release, warrants, citations, investigations, field sheets, violation reports ledger cards and documentation of death. These documents are placed in a letter size manilla folder with the offenders named listed on the folder. The folder is placed in a cardboard box measuring 10" high x 12" high x 15" deep. The closed files must be placed in alphabetical order until the box has been filled. Once the box has been filled , a standard self adhesive Records Box Label is completed and placed on the box. ( See Appendix B) All records that are being transferred for

storage must be documented on a Records Transfer list. ( See Appendix C) When all boxes are have been properly labeled and the transfer form has been completed, the records are transported by courier to the Records Management Services of the Department of Probation, Parole and Pardon Services located in Columbia, S.C.

The boxes of closed files are received by the Records Management Services. A member of the Records Management Services staff runs a county report from the Agency's Offender Information System of the cases closed by that county. The report known as the Closed Episode Box Entry should reflect the closed records in the boxes received from the county. After the records have been verified the box is assigned a number and placed on the shelf in Records Management Services for storage. The box of files will remain on the shelf for three (3) years. The records are removed from the shelf to be copied per the Box Inventory Report. Prior to the boxes being sent out to be copied, the Records Management Services staff will check the boxes to make sure all the files are in the boxes because the records are sometimes sent back to the county or divisions and have not been returned. When all the records have been verified, the Records Management Services will prepare each file to micro filmed. This is done by checking each file and removing duplicates, staples, paperclips and tape torn documents. Files are also checked to make sure they are in alphabetical order.

Boxes of files that have been processed and are ready to be micro filmed are assigned a hold number to indicate the files are ready to be copied. Records Management Services prepares on average of 25-30 boxes per month to micro filmed. The number may increase to 40 if Records Management Services prepares personnel files for micro filming. Boxes that are ready for micro filming are picked up by S.C. Data of Raleigh, N.C. The vendor that is used is chosen by the Budget and Control through the bid process. The contract is a five year contract that is renewable annually. The annual cost of micro filming for the Department of Probation, Parole and Services is \$56,500. That averages out to \$44 per 1000 images, \$7.50 per role or 4.4¢ per copy which

includes a duplicate copy of the micro film. It takes the vendor approximately thirty (30) days to to pick up the boxes, copy the files and return the records to the Records Management Service with a duplicate copy of the micro film.

Upon receipt of the records and the duplicate micro film, the Records Management Staff will review the film and do a random check of the files to determine if the film is readable and if files have been accurately copied. This is a quality control function that is used by Records Management Services. If the micro film meets standards and is certified, the Records Management Services will assign the film an role number and fax the Records Transmittal and Disposition Report to the vendor. (See Appendix D) The vendor sends the silver original micro film to the State Archives and History for storage. The staff at Archives and History will review the original micro film to determine the if the film is acceptable for storage. When the film has been certified and accepted for storage, Archive<sup>s</sup> and History will notify the vendor and Records Management Services. After the staff receives notification, Records Management Services will assign a frame number to each file on the micro film. The micro film is then stored in a cabinet for seventy-five (75) years. The Records Management Services will then contact the South Carolina Department of Corrections to pick up the files for destruction.

To help me determine what the Agency should do about the problem, I decided to look at other agencies and organizations to see how long they keep their records and what methods are being used to store these records. I spoke with Ms. Doris Holmes, Clerk of Court for Saluda County, who informed me that their records were stored in the basement of the courthouse. All of the records are stored in a file by the case or indictment number. The filed are stored in numerical order and placed in a roller file system. Ms. Holmes stated her staff can easily retrieve records if there are any requests for them. She also informed me that storage space was not an issue yet because the county does not generate many records annually. Saluda County records are retained forever.

After having examined a small organization's records retention procedure, I decided to review the process of a larger organization that keeps the same records that we keep. I contacted the Richland County Court of General Clerk of Court Office to find out how they process and store their records. I spoke to Ms. Emily Meadows, a General Sessions Records Clerk, who informed me that they keep their records indefinitely. Ms. Meadows stated the records are handled in the same manner as the records of the Saluda County Clerk of Court's Office. The records are placed in a file and listed by the case or indictment number. After the file has been closed, the records are placed in a boxes and stored on site until they can be micro filmed. Richland County has its own micro filming department located the in the Judicial Center. Ms. Meadows stated the filed are copied by the year. The micro filming department is in the process of copying the 1999 records. Once the records have been copied, the hard copies are sent out to be destroyed and the film is stored. She also stated the records are easily retrievable if the case or indictment number is known.

I had reviewed the records retention procedure of a small and large organization whose records are limited to their local areas. I decided to review the process of a large state agency and chose the South Carolina Department of Corrections because their records are some of the same the we keep. I spoke to Mr. Dennis Patterson, Assistant Director of Inmates Records, about the records they kept, how they are stored the records and the retention schedule for these records. He informed me that the records division for the Department of Corrections is located in a large warehouse type building at headquarters for the department. Mr. Patterson stated that once the inmate file has been closed it is placed in a file and stored by the inmate number until it can be micro filmed. The Department of Corrections also has its own micro filming department located in the warehouse. The Department of Corrections has four filming machines that are operated by inmates who have been trained to complete process. Buying the equipment and using the inmate labor to process the records has been very cost effective for the department.

Once the record has been transferred to microfilm, it is stored on site for eighty (80) years. Mr. Patterson stated storage space was not an issue because they are in a large warehouse type facility but indicated they will exploring alternative measures because the space will eventually run out. He informed me that Department of Corrections could micro film our records if a price could be negotiated.

The Records Management Services has been dealing with the records retention issue for many years but can not get the leadership to decide on how solve the problem. I think there are fundamental questions that need to asked and answered before a solution can be reached. We need to ask why are we duplicating the services that other agencies provide. Who benefits from these records? What is the cost of developing a new process for storage? It is not until we ask and answer the who, what, when, where and why questions that a solution can be found.

After having reviewed the procedures of other organizations and interviewing agency staff, I conclude that there is an alternate solution that would serve the department's need. The Department has a very good data base system known as the Offender Information System. This data system has been in place since 1993 and it captures all of the information on the records that are being micro filmed. If the staff enter the information into the system properly, the information can be retrieved at the stroke of a key. If it is necessary to have an image of the records, they can scanned and saved as PDF file. Each county office has a scanner that can be used to scan the documents. It will require the county office to do a little more work but it will make the records easily accessible. The records could be easily transmitted via email and there would not be a big cost associated with the implementing the process because the infrastructure is already in place. For quality control purposes the records that have been scanned should be sent to Records Management Services for review to make sure all pertinent documents have been copied. All of the records prior to 1993 would be managed by the Records Management Services in accordance with the current practices and procedures.

The department has decided to upgrade technology and overhauling it's Offender Information System (OIS). Consultants have been hired to review the system and make recommendations for changes. I, along others in the department have been task to meet with the consultants to review each function of the information system. One aspect of the new system is to incorporate my proposal to scan records into the system as a documents management feature. The cost associated with the implementation of the proposed process to the department would not be significant. The Department would have to upgrade the scanners in the larger counties based on the caseload( approximately 20 counties).The funding source for this project are funds received from the Maybank's Monies. The records would be accessible to any user of the OIS system. If the system is implemented there would be a potential savings of \$45,000 annually for microfilming offender records and there would be no requirement for staff to contact the Records Management Service's for the retrieval of records that have been scanned into the system.

The department plans to implement the new system within the next six months. The consultants have stated that re-engineering process is going to take that long to because every aspect of the current program is going to be reviewed and evaluated. After the new system has been installed and in place for 90 days, I will send out a customer survey/evaluation form to get feedback on the new process.

## APPENDICES

# Offender Records







