

MARICOPA COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Bureau of Internal Oversight

Audits and Inspections Unit



SIMS Release Process Audit

Report # BA2023-0001

Introduction

On December 27, 2022, the Bureau of Internal Oversight received a request for an audit of the Sheriff's Information Management Services (SIMS) Division process for the release of Maricopa County Sheriff's Office inmates. The request referred to inadvertent administrative errors that were not identified during the quality assurance process, which resulted in the delayed release of two separate inmates. The Professional Standards Bureau (PSB) conducted a preliminary inquiry and determined that the volume of work and staffing levels, combined with the many nuances of processing legal paperwork from various courts, contributed to the conditions present for these administrative errors to occur and not be identified in the quality assurance process. Based on these findings and previous similar investigations, PSB requested an audit be conducted.

Procedures

On February 7, 2023, the Audit and Inspections Unit (AIU) conducted an opening audit conference regarding the inmate release process audit. During this conference, AIU explained the audit process and arranged with SIMS command staff for follow-up meetings to learn about the SIMS inmate release process.

After the initial opening conference, AIU formulated a plan that allowed the team to focus its resources and create an organized approach to conducting the audit.

Additionally, AIU conducted an on-site visit to SIMS to observe the inmate release process and paperwork entry on February 16th. During this visit, the team gained a better understanding of how SIMS processes an inmate release and how extremely complex the process for initiating an inmate release is.

AIU also conducted meetings with SHIELD (Sheriff Inmate Electronic Data System) Information Technology staff to obtain an understanding of the SHIELD system and how it applies to the inmate release process. During these meetings, AIU received instruction regarding SHIELD, its uses, and its limitations as it pertains to the inmate release process.

AIU held two additional meetings with SIMS staff to further our knowledge of the inmate release process, obtaining insight from Inmate Release Specialists, Leads, and Supervisors in regard to the inmate release process. (See below for a description of the tiered system of Specialist positions and their responsibilities.)

Criteria

MCSO Policy DO-2, Release Process

MCSO Policy DN-6, Inactive Releases to Out-of_County Law Enforcement Agencies

MCSO Policy DM-2, Computation of Projected Release Dates

MCSO Policy GC-17, Employee Disciplinary Procedures

Sheriff's Information Management Services Operations Manual

General Objectives

To determine if MCSO SIMS has adequate controls to ensure:

- Inmate release information is received from the various Courts
- Inmate release information is entered/updated into the database correctly
- Inmate release information entered into the databases is verified for accuracy
- Inmates are released timely based on information entered by SIMS

- Adequate staffing levels are maintained based on the volume of work
- Corrective action to inmate release errors are appropriate

Scope

The Bureau of Internal Oversight (BIO) conducted a procedural audit of the SIMS release process. The audit period was determined by the audit test performed. In general, our work covered activities from July 2022 through December 2022.

This report and its recommendations are based on information taken from interviews and observations and do not represent an examination of all related transactions and activities.

Methodology

The audit included a review and analysis of the process for initiating an inmate release, the receipt of release information from the various courts, the data entry for inmate releases, and the quality controls in place for the review of each inmate release. We utilized several methodologies to achieve the stated objectives. These evidence-gathering techniques included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Collecting information and documentation,
- Conducting interviews with appropriate MCSO employees,
- Observing facilities and processes,
- Reviewing electronic and paper records,
- Reviewing internal manuals and procedures,
- Performing selected in-depth analysis of events and other procedures, and
- Final analysis and evaluating of the observations.

Sheriff's Information Management Services Division

The Sheriff's Information Management Services Division oversees control of all custody-related court information processes and services for the Sheriff's Office. The primary objectives of the SIMS Division are to accurately convert information from legal source documents to automated records, ensure victims' rights are protected, oversee MCSO's inmate work program, and ensure MCSO adheres to the court-ordered custody status of inmates. SIMS is responsible for the continuous updating of each inmate's judicial data through the entire period of incarceration.

Inmate Release Process

The inmate release process involves the following positions:

- Inmate Release Unit Specialist – Responsible for reviewing and processing SHIELD reports to identify inmates for release, as well as other related duties.
- Inmate Release Specialist Lead – Responsible for directing and supervision of the IRU Specialists' activities.
- Inmate Release Specialist Senior – Responsible for the training of SIMS Division employees.
- SIMS Supervisor - Responsible for supervising the Specialists.

It should be noted that the Specialist position refers to the tiered SIMS Inmate Release Specialist positions who have received training in specialized legal, clerical, and customer service support and performs work related to an inmate's progress through the judicial system.

Currently, SIMS receives court information 3 ways:

- Fax – they have 2 fax machines
- Email – the emails are flagged when they are printed, the printed copy is time stamped and sorted into the type of document it is and then entered; once entered the email is checked
- Jail run – employees go to Superior Court to pick up documents at 11 a.m., 2 p.m., and 5 p.m.

Court paperwork is sorted into the following piles:

- Arraignments
- Bond set
- Confinements
- Releases
- Court cards
- DOC
- Future confinements

Court paperwork is processed in the following order:

- Releases
- Confinements
- DOC
- Arraignments
- Bond Set
- Court Cards

It should be noted that the order of processing has been changed as of April 17, 2023. The order of processing has been changed to process confinement orders prior to release orders to prevent an inmate from early release when there is a subsequent confinement order.

First, the employee looks for a Judicial Status Report (JSR.) Then the employee checks that the court paperwork for each case is present. There may be multiple cases for the inmate from multiple courts. If the court paperwork is missing they cannot continue to process the release without it. They may be able to go into the Integrated Criminal Justice Information System (ICJis) and print the paperwork if it is from a Maricopa County court. Once they ensured they have all of the court paperwork the employee then checks the file. Once this is done they can start the release process in SHIELD.

In SHIELD the inmate's booking number is entered and the employee will confirm the name on the screen with the name on the file, then enter the appropriate data into SHIELD and start a judicial search to look for warrants. The majority of the releases are done from ITR, so in most cases, the inmate will have to be transported to ITR to be released. If the inmate has a hold from another agency they would be notified that the inmate is ready to be picked up via message except for U.S. Marshals who needs to be called. If they say they (the other agency or Marshall's Office) will not be picking up, no response within 24 hours, or the hold is dropped then the release can proceed. Once the release is ready to finish the employee enters the inmate's booking number again and it should now show "active release." Once the screen is refreshed, on the right side of the screen there is a release checklist, if the inmate has any active warrants they will show at this point in the process. Once the initial SIMS Specialist has completed the release process it is removed from their dashboard and will now appear on the supervisor's dashboard for review and approval. To approve a release the supervisor will take the inmate's file and compare it to the JSR and the file just like the SIMS Specialist has done. The

supervisor will then review SHIELD data to ensure it is correct and agrees with the court paperwork. If everything appears correct the supervisor will enter their approval information.

SHIELD

SHIELD was designed to facilitate inmate data management, to receive information from legal source documents to be retained in automated records, and to help ensure MCSO adheres to the court-ordered custody status of inmates.

The current version of SHIELD employs checklists on the right-hand side of the screen that will show as each item is processed. The system prevents the file from being completed until everything on the checklist is checked off. The supervisor also has a checklist and must ensure that all checklists are complete before signing off.

The MCSO Technology Bureau is currently developing updates for SHIELD that are expected to include:

- Sentence Completion
- Inmates on hold
- DOC holds
- Summons booking

SHIELD Version 2 requires SIMS supervisor approval before SHIELD moves the release to an Administrative Supervisor for approval. The release cannot move forward without both supervisors' approval.

Summary of Observations

- A. SIMS receives court documents and inmate holds from other agencies in three primary ways, email, fax, and court cards. Additionally, some are handwritten and may be copied from multi-part carbon copies. These documents may be cryptic in nature. For example, the automated court documents from Maricopa County Superior Court may extend portions of the release order to a second page, with release or hold information being difficult to find. Handwritten court documents are also difficult to decipher. An example of this observation is a local city court's order to dismiss two counts and a disposition on the third count of "13dits."
- B. Documents may be received in electronic format, via fax, or handwritten, sometimes more than once creating confusion and requiring employees to contact the court for clarification.
- C. Inmate Release Specialists are under significant time constraints to process releases based on complex release rules, complicated legal terminology, and utilizing various types of source documents also requiring the employee to contact the courts for clarification, further delaying processing.
- D. The inmate release process incorporates a robust quality control system of supervisory review, requiring at least two additional employees to miss an error on the release for an erroneous release to occur.
- E. During the time frame examined late releases comprised 0.12% of all releases with an average delayed release of 3.7 days.
- F. Late releases are usually brought to SIMS attention via third-party sources, such as attorneys or relatives of inmates.
- G. When erroneous releases are identified, SIMS management staff conducts a review to determine the cause of the error, identify the responsible employees, and take corrective action. Cases are also referred to the Professional Standards Bureau for investigation.
- H. Referring to MCSO Policy GC-17, these incidents appear to be primarily Category 2 or Category 3 work performance situations with first-offense Category 2 incidents qualifying for Supervisor Initiated Intervention as opposed to PSB investigations.

- I. SHIELD improvements already in progress are expected to help prevent erroneous releases, based on new reporting and quality control requirements.

Recommendations

- A. Request Maricopa County Internal Audit to perform an audit of the inmate release order process within the Maricopa County Superior Court
- B. Establish a process for inmate release orders to be sent via email, with specific email addresses as needed to funnel into one regularly monitored email inbox.
- C. Liaison with the courts and other agencies regarding the use of email and consistent reporting practices.
- D. For those agencies that require the use of telefax communication, have information technology staff set these faxes to funnel to a monitored email inbox as opposed to printing on paper.
- E. Continue the SHIELD improvement process to address SIMS specific concerns.
- F. Evaluate the existing 12-month on-the-job basic training for Inmate Release Specialists to include legal terminology and court procedures.
- G. Evaluate current staffing levels to determine if there is a need for increased staffing based on work volume.
- H. Partner with Human Resources to evaluate the job description for the position of Inmate Release Specialist with the goal of refining the position to meet SIMS business needs.

Conclusion:

All involved parties reviewed the report and recommendations on August 31, 2023, and found that the report met the identified objectives.

Date Started: February 7, 2023
Date Completed: June 7, 2023
Timeframe: June 1, 2022 – December 31, 2022
Assigned Auditors: Sr. Auditor D. Paul B5459, Sr. Auditor R. Jamieson B3178

I have reviewed this inspection report.

Lt. Brian Arthur S1806

9/7/23

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Date