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# Smooth Transition: Law Enforcement Agencies across PA Embrace NIBRS Reporting with Ease



Since 1930, police and law enforcement across the United States have relied on the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) system to collect and analyze crime data. For decades, UCR served as a comprehensive repository of crime statistics but relied solely on summary-based reporting, collecting data on a limited set of crime categories and providing aggregate statistics at the national, state, and local levels for the FBI, to produce statistical reports on crime trends, patterns, and rates at the local, state, and national levels. The UCR

provided valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and law enforcement agencies in understanding crime dynamics and formulating effective crime prevention strategies.

However, as technology advances and demands for more detailed reporting on crime become a necessity, the FBI has begun sunsetting UCR and many states have adopted the more rigorous National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) as it offers a more comprehensive and granular approach to crime reporting, providing more data-driven insights into crime patterns, trends, and relationships.

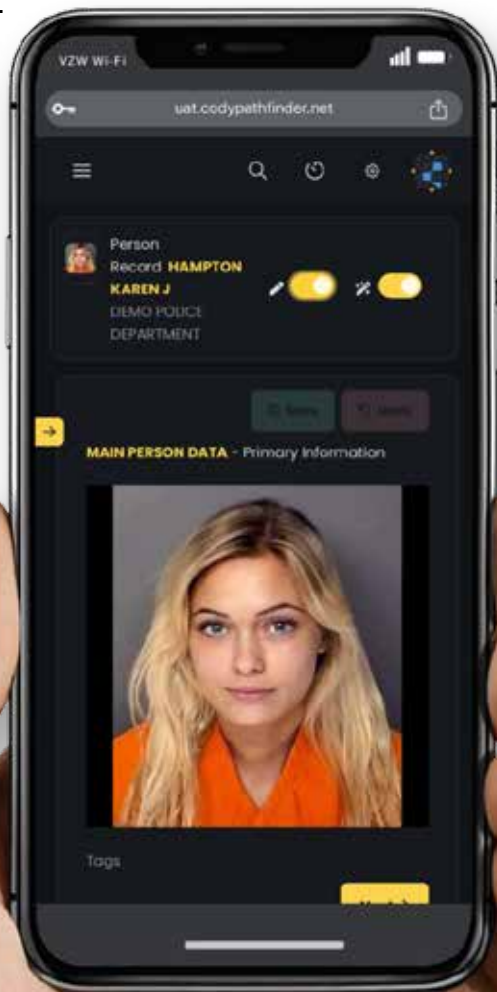
In contrast to the summary and hierarchical model in UCR reporting where only the top-level offense in an incident

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is reported, NIBRS employs an incident-based approach, capturing detailed information on all offenses involved in an incident, including the characteristics of victims, offenders, and offenses. Unlike the UCR, NIBRS covers a broader range of criminal offenses and includes additional data elements such as location, weapon type, and relationship between victims and offenders. By mandating the switch to NIBRS, the federal government aims to modernize crime reporting practices, enhance data quality, and empower law enforcement agencies with actionable insights for more informed decision-making and proactive crime prevention efforts. Compliance to NIBRS reporting requirements is also mandatory for agencies who want to maintain their eligibility for any sort of federal funding.

### Why shift to NIBRS now?

While a number of police departments in Pennsylvania are waiting until the state officially mandates the shift away from UCR to NIBRS reporting, many departments across the state have made the choice to transition now and are leaning on their records management system (RMS) providers to provide the technology and support services to help them navigate the transition smoothly and effectively.



Chief Kevin Sharkey and Lieutenant Wayne Cochran of Slippery Rock University Police stress the importance of getting ahead of the mandates. “To be a leader in Law Enforcement,” Chief Sharkey said, “we need to be ahead of the mandates so when it's required, the department is already in a place to easily succeed and be compliant.” Lt. Cochran agrees. “Once we became educated in the NIBRS offering from our RMS/CAD provider, CODY Systems, we wanted to make the switch as soon as possible in anticipation of the mandates.”

**City of Harrisburg Police Department’s Accreditation Manager, Monica Robinson, shares insights into their decision to adopt NIBRS reporting. “Our primary goal was federal compliance,” she explains. “With grant opportunities available and CODY Systems’ NIBRS-compliant RMS, we wanted to transition as soon as possible.”**

Ms. Robinson underscores the importance of collecting more thorough data to provide accurate information on crime within their jurisdiction, highlighting CODY's role in facilitating this transition. “With assistance of the CODY technology and project management team, we were able to successfully transition to NIBRS back in January of 2023, which put us way ahead of the curve.”

Officer Nate Westerman of East Lampeter Police Department concurs. “Why wait to make the transition if your RMS provider already has the technology to support NIBRS reporting”? East Lampeter PD was the first in Lancaster County to start submitting NIBRS data to the state.

### RMS Technology Support - Validation and Submission

When considering the change to the more detailed NIBRS reporting from UCR summaries, the main challenge is the sheer volume of data that must be captured for each incident. Whereas UCR only recognizes and requires data on the most serious offense per incident, NIBRS requires agencies to submit detailed information about

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all offenses committed in a single incident. There is also the reclassification of offenses into a more complex crime category index. In short, to get this amount of data entered accurately into the RMS so it can be validated and submitted to the state, it is paramount that the RMS system provide the data entry and error-checking tools to take the guesswork out of the data gathering and ensure accurate submissions.

“During the transition period,” explained Ms. Robinson, “we learned about several areas where we needed to improve and train our Officers on reporting to meet the NIBRS standards. The support and assistance CODY provided assisted us with certification navigating the submissions process was invaluable.”

**“The seamless integration of data flowing from our CODY RMS directly to the state reporting site saves time and effort,” says Officer Westerman. “Plus, with the move to the web-based Pathfinder RMS from CODY, NIBRS will be available on different devices in the field as well.”**

The ease of workflow in the NIBRS portion of the RMS makes all the difference. “The CODY NIBRS report form is self-explanatory,” comment Lt. Cochran. “It has pop-ups that alert us to errors and provide an explanation as to where the error is occurring.” Having technology support as the agency worked through all the test scenarios was key. “Our CODY PM helped us get the first one or two scenarios completed and then let us work through the scenarios. He was very patient supportive as we worked out the kinks and user errors.”

### **UCR to NIBRS: Lessons learned and Best Practices for a Smooth Transition**

For a department the size of City of Harrisburg PD (and for any size PD for that matter), Ms. Robinson stressed the importance of defining a plan of success when preparing for the transition from UCR to NIBRS. “We implemented a timeline and Bureau-wide plan to assist with our transition to NIBRS,” Robinson said. “Our goal was to be compliant by the first day of the next calendar year (January 1, 2023) to have a clean break between UCR and NIBRS data.”

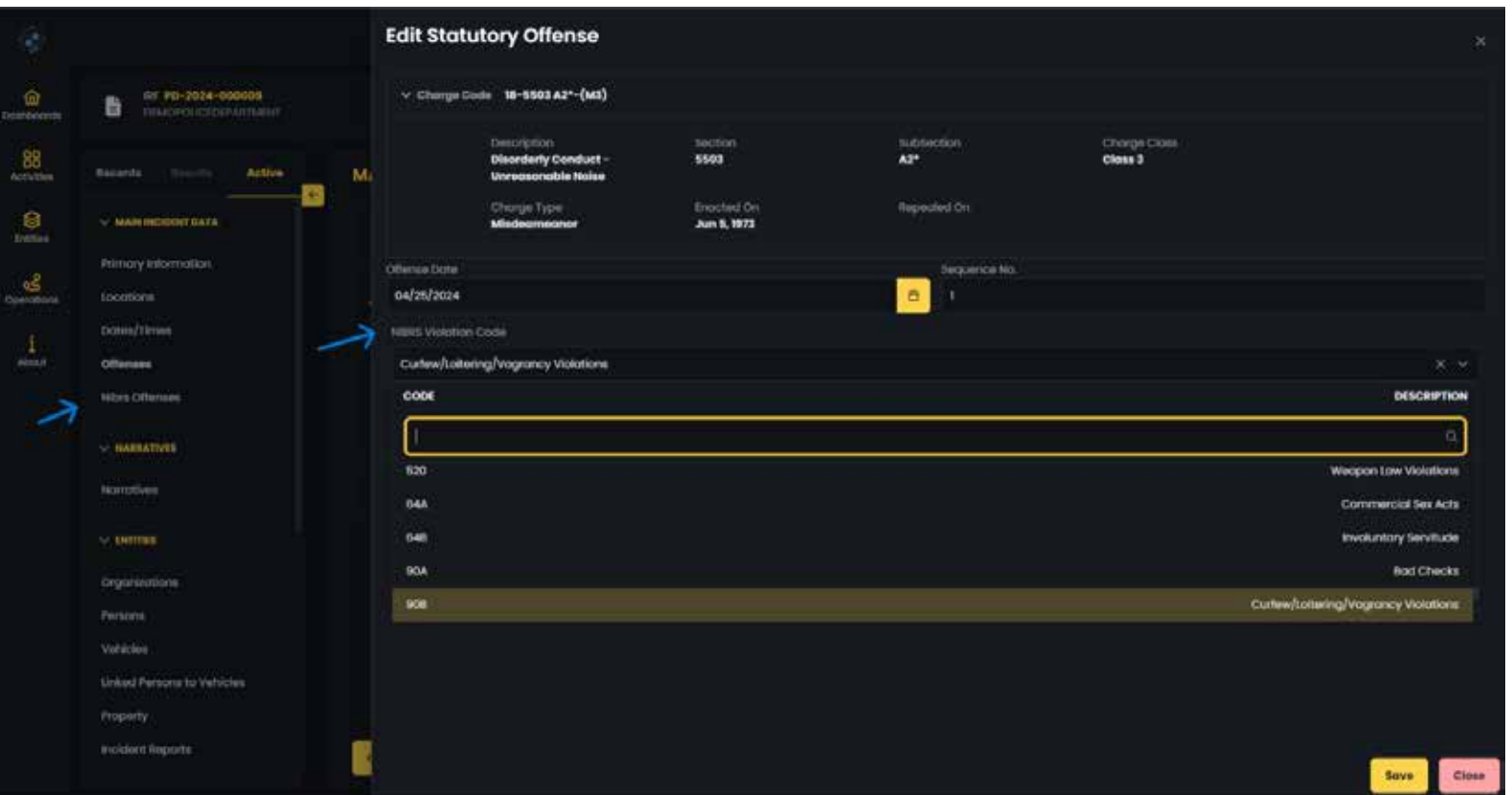
This plan included:

- 1. Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) NIBRS Training:** Attended virtual training by PSP to learn more about NIBRS and reporting requirements.
- 2. NIBRS Certification Application:** Submitted the NIBRS application to begin the transition/certification process.
- 3. Grant Funding:** Ensured necessary funding was applied for/received from relevant grant opportunities.
- 4. Test Scenarios:** Worked with CODY to complete the test scenarios for NIBRS submission.
- 5. PA NIBRS Scenarios Audit:** Corrected any mistakes that were relayed from the scenarios submission.
- 6. NIBRS Training for Officers:** Held Bureau-wide trainings over the course of approximately 3 weeks to ensure Officers understood what new information was needed in reports for NIBRS compliance.
- 7. Begin NIBRS Reporting:** Occurred at the start of the calendar year for a clean break between UCR and NIBRS data.

Having submitted UCR data for so long, Officer Westerman recalls that breaking old habits was tricky. “The most difficult task was becoming acquainted with the new data-gathering process and breaking old UCR data habits.” Officer Westerman also emphasized the benefit of having an RMS partner that can provide on-going support and training as the department navigated the change. “The tutorial videos available on CODY’s online training portal were invaluable in supporting us during the switch to NIBRS. We also had a single point of contact at CODY who was extremely helpful and promptly answered our calls and emails.”

“We found it difficult at first to transition from the summary UCR method to the way that NIBRS offenses are categorized under other offenses,” recalls Lt. Cochran. “We also have had to refine our thinking in terms of how to categorize offenses. For instance, being a University PD, officers have the right to use discretion when encountering students who are caught underage drinking, based on different factors. If the officer chooses to send the student to Student Conduct (University Judicial Process),” continues Lt. Cochran, “the offense is not captured in NIBRS because it’s considered a group B offense and no arrest is made. This means that our underage drinking NIBRS stats don’t truly reflect the underage drinking issue plaguing our campus.” When applying for grants for

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federal funding, only NIBRS stats are applicable, so the University has had to adjust how it handles certain types of offenses.

“Having a technology partner and trusted resource in your department’s RMS provider is critical to ensuring success,” emphasized Lt. Cochran. “CODY provided thought leadership by offering NIBRS training from the state at their annual users’ conference and has on-demand training available 24/7 on their online customer site. Plus, I know that I can pick up the phone and call my project manager anytime I need some additional help. This has been very reassuring to our department while we worked through the transition.”

Training seems to be one of the key takeaways in terms of how to ensure successful transition to NIBRS. “Take all the classes you can,” encourages Lt. Cochran. “We all learn through repetition, so practice is the key.” Lt Cochran also encourages networking with other departments who are going through the same process. “Network, network, network within the RMS community! I have reached out to users across the state from other departments using CODY’s NIBRS RMS and they have been incredibly helpful for troubleshooting issues.”

But, at the end of the day, it all comes down to the partner you have on the support line when questions arise, which

they most assuredly will. “Our NIBRS PM at CODY was only ever a phone call or an email away,” said Lt. Cochran. “He was always willing to help us fix an issue, but also encouraged us to share issues or problems that we were having so they could be addressed through an update to the software.”

The transition from UCR to NIBRS reporting in Pennsylvania represents a pivotal moment for law enforcement agencies, marking a significant step towards more accurate and comprehensive statewide crime data collection. With support from technology partners like CODY Systems, agencies have overcome challenges and embraced innovative solutions to facilitate this transition seamlessly. The agency insights provided here underscore the importance of proactive planning, collaboration, and real-time support in navigating this journey effectively.

**If you are looking to apply for a grant or need a quote for CODY NIBRS-complaint Pathfinder RMS (or would just like some additional info related to this article), please send an email to [info@codysystems.com](mailto:info@codysystems.com) or call 610.326.7476 to speak to one of CODY’s knowledgeable representatives.**