

The Justice Department's Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering and Tracking (SMART) recently held its 2014 Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA) Workshops Jan. 22-23 and Feb. 25-26, at the National Advocacy Center in Columbia, S.C.

"Our primary mission is to help our state, tribal, and territorial partners meet their responsibilities for registering, tracking and notifying communities about sex offenders," said Acting Director of the SMART Office Dawn Doran. "We were very pleased to bring together and train the professionals whose work is so vital to the safety of our communities."

The SORNA workshops were designed to further assist states, tribes and U.S. territories to substantially implement SORNA, Title I of the Adam Walsh Act. Due to budget constraints, these were the first national SORNA training workshops since January 2011. Approximately 200 sex offender registry officials and law enforcement personnel attended the two-day SORNA workshops, where they participated in working groups and panel discussions, and heard presentations from faculty from the U.S. Marshals Service's National Sex Offender Targeting Center, INTERPOL-Washington, the FBI DNA Laboratory, FBI-Criminal Justice Information Services, state, territory and tribal representatives and SMART Office staff.

"Attending the SMART Office's 2014 SORNA Workshop was an invaluable opportunity," said Linda Schweig, Program Manager for the Violent Crime Information Center, California Department of Justice. "By literally bringing everyone into the same room, [the SMART Office] created a "one stop shop" to learn from our federal partners ... to collaborate on issues and discuss opportunities. Through the panels and break-out sessions, there were conversations and work started that will continue long after the conference. Overall, the opportunity to meet with so many other registering agency officials really highlighted the interconnectedness of our work and shared goals under SORNA."

Other jurisdictions also found the workshop beneficial.

Officer Jason Tarkong, with the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Sex Offender Registry's Department of Public Safety, found the workshop to be a great asset in keeping his jurisdiction SORNA compliant. "I made important contacts and started networking with other law enforcement from states, tribes and territories, and federal agencies," Tarkong said. "As a result, this helped CNMI improve the Sex Offender Program by writing new laws to meet the SORNA requirements. CNMI continues to maintain its substantial implementation status due to the continued training provided by the SMART Office."

SORNA Workshop participants also engaged in breakout discussions targeting specific issues on registration and notification for their particular jurisdiction and region. Every SORNA jurisdiction was invited and more than 150 jurisdictions were represented.

Since the establishment of SORNA, the Department has continuously assisted jurisdictions in implementing the Act by creating a comprehensive national system for tracking and registering sex offenders. To date, 82 jurisdictions (17 states, three territories and 62 tribes) have substantially implemented SORNA.

"The more I learn the more I realize how much I did not know," said Tarkong. "Thank you SMART Office for the education and wisdom provided to our little corner of the world. It is a pleasure to know with your help, we are keeping our islands safer."