



Feb. 28, 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Forfeiture Accountability System Created *Will Collect and Report Data on State Civil Asset Forfeitures*

MONTGOMERY, Ala. – The Alabama District Attorneys Association today joined with state Rep. Arnold Mooney, the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency and a wide range of public policy groups in announcing the creation of the Alabama Forfeiture Accountability System, a breakthrough data collection and reporting system that will shed more light on the use of civil asset forfeitures in Alabama.

The AFAS is a new database system that will track and compile all state civil asset forfeiture cases in Alabama, generate reports to lawmakers and state officials and make useful information on the use of forfeitures available to the public.

“This has been a work in progress since last spring, when legislation to create a data collection and reporting system for civil asset forfeiture system died when time ran out on the legislative session,” said Barry Matson, executive director of the Alabama District Attorneys Association and the state Office of Prosecution Services (OPS). “But we continued to work with many groups – from law enforcement and state agencies to policy groups with an interest in asset forfeiture – to voluntarily put the system in place.”

Beginning Friday, March 1, district attorneys across the state will collect the data related to asset forfeitures, including filings, pleadings and court rulings, and submit that information to the ACJIC database. ACJIC, a division of ALEA, which will compile the data and make reports to the governor, lawmakers and the public. The University of Alabama’s Center for the Advancement of Public Safety is creating the AFAS database, which will be operated by ACJIC.

State Rep. Mooney, one of the sponsors of last year’s bill, said the creation of AFAS will bring both transparency and accountability to the civil asset forfeiture debate.

“I can’t overstate the importance to lawmakers of having accurate, reliable information as we look legislatively at civil asset forfeitures,” Mooney said. “This new system will help paint a clearer picture of what is actually going on in the state. I am proud to be part of this solution.”

AFAS also has the full support of Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall.

“I applaud Director Matson and the Alabama District Attorneys Association for taking it upon themselves to ensure that asset forfeiture in Alabama is transparent and above board,” Marshall said in a

statement. "My office will be a willing partner in this endeavor, as we continue to fight alongside local law enforcement to make Alabama a safer place to live."

In addition to the AG's Office, ALEA and AJCIC, law enforcement support for the new data collection and reporting system came from the Alabama Sheriffs Association and the Alabama Association of Chiefs of Police.

A number of public policy organizations, both in state and nationally, also played a part in the creation of AFAS, according to District Attorney Tom Anderson of Enterprise, the president of the Alabama District Attorneys Association. These include the Alabama Policy Institute, the Institute for Justice, the Heritage Foundation and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

"First of all, I want to thank Gov. Ivey and Attorney General Marshall for their support," Anderson said. "And I certainly applaud the hard work of the OPS, ALEA and the ACJIC staff that went into this great plan. I also thank the many groups that provided advice and support. This truly has been a team effort.

"At its heart, this is truly about due process and protecting the rights of individuals, and assuring the public that whatever we are doing will be done in a transparent way."

Several of the groups sent out press releases today in support of the new system.

"Since asset forfeiture confiscates property from individuals – often without a trial and sometimes without a charged crime – today's announcement should be celebrated as a good direction for Alabamians," said Lisa B. Nelson, chief executive officer of ALEC. "The goal of government should be to increase freedom and protect the rights of individuals. The move by the Alabama District Attorneys Association is a great example of nonpartisan, limited government principles at work."

The Alabama Policy Institute issued this statement:

"This database will provide lawmakers with the information necessary to make informed policy decisions and taxpayers with the ability to hold their government accountable. Alabama joins 37 other states around the country that maintain a centralized reporting repository of property confiscated under civil asset forfeiture."

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