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Record Checks Could Have Uncovered Past Crimes by Accused Killer

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) Almost every time Henry Louis Wallace entered the criminal justice system, he was quickly spit back out.

Now Wallace is charged with killing 11 women in North Carolina and South Carolina. His arrest last Sunday in Charlotte, N.C., brought to light a series of offenses that police and prosecutors said they didn't know about beforehand.

Incomplete rap sheets, overburdened prosecutors and antiquated computer systems that can make background checks long and laborious were all offered as reasons Wallace eluded justice for so long.

Anyone who checked could have found Wallace's complete history, State Law Enforcement Division spokesman Hugh Munn said Thursday. But law enforcers apparently never found him threatening enough to pursue.

``They considered him just a penny-ante crook,'' Munn said.

When Wallace was arrested last Sunday, there were three warrants for his arrest outstanding from Washington State for violating probation in a 1988 burglary conviction, from Allendale County for failing to show up in court on a 1990 attempted rape charge, and from March 4, when he failed to show up on shoplifting charges in Charlotte.

He had been convicted of burglary in 1991 in Barnwell and Allendale Counties and charged with rape in Rock Hill, near Charlotte, in 1992.

After moving to South Carolina from Washington state, where he served in the U.S. Navy, Wallace was arrested in 1990 and charged with attempted rape in Allendale.

Days later, he was released into a pre-trial intervention program for non-violent first offenders. Authorities didn't know about the Washington state burglary conviction, and Wallace soon disappeared from the program.

The same day Wallace was arrested on the rape charge, the body of 17-year-old Tashanda Bethea of Barnwell was found in the next county.

Authorities interrogated him for four hours, impounded his car and talked to hundreds of people, but couldn't conclusively link him to the killing.

Ten more women were slain before police realized Wallace might be a serial killer.

He spent four months in prison for the 1991 burglary convictions. After his release, Allendale County Sheriff Francis Coath Jr. could have pressed the outstanding warrant from the 1990 attempted rape case, but didn't. He did not return messages seeking comment Friday.

Wallace repeatedly violated his parole after moving to Charlotte. His probation manager, George Pettigrew, said the violations were reported to South Carolina authorities, but officials there told The Charlotte Observer they never got the reports.

In February 1992, Rock Hill police arrested Wallace, this time for allegedly raping a 17-year-old girl at gunpoint. Again, the outstanding 1990 Allendale warrant didn't show up in a background check.

Wallace was never indicted in the Rock Hill case. It was still in judicial limbo when Thomas Pope took over the solicitor's office in January 1993.

``They just didn't have any record-keeping,'' Pope said. ``On the older cases ... we're having trouble finding documentation.''

Figures compiled by court administrators show that 54 percent of the cases in Pope's circuit are more than a year old. Pope has seven assistants to handle the 6,700 cases that were pending Jan. 30.

On Feb. 4, Wallace was arrested again, this time on a shoplifting charge.

A thorough computer search would have found the arrest warrants, the rape charge and the fact that he had served four months in prison for burglary.

Instead, Wallace was released and told to appear in court March 4. The last four victims were killed after that release.

Capt. Jim Martin, head of the State Law Enforcement Division's criminal information system, said many officials don't have computer access to such information. Although they can ask by phone for a background check, they often don't.

"You know yourself that when you don't have it on your desk or in your office, sometimes you hesitate to call somebody or ask them to look it up," Martin said.

Randolph Murdaugh III, the prosecutor in the 1990 attempted rape case, still doesn't have a computer that could check Wallace's record nationally or even statewide. Only six of the state's 16 prosecutor's offices have such computer hookups, Martin said.

Also, the FBI says records of what happens after an arrest often are incomplete because the information is not submitted by local officials.

"We have the authority to collect this information, but we don't have anything that mandates state and local people submit the data to us," said Emmet Rathbun of the FBI's criminal records division.

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CRIME BILL -- DOLLARS FOR SOUTH CAROLINA, 1995 - 2000
(Revised 8/22/94)

LAW ENFORCEMENT

- * **100,000 POLICE** -- Guaranteed minimum of \$44 million -- more than 500 police officers at \$75,000 per officer.
 - ** Given South Carolina's share of the population and the additional \$6.5 billion in discretionary dollars, South Carolina should expect a total of about \$140 million over the next 6 years.
 - ** Of the total, up to 85% can be used to hire about 1,600 police officers. At least 15% -- \$21 million -- can be used to help pay the training, overtime and administrative costs of implementing community policing in South Carolina.
- * **PRISONS & BOOT CAMPS** -- \$75 million for prison grants, including military-style boot camp prisons. An additional estimated \$75 million is possible if South Carolina meets the "Truth in Sentencing" target of second-time violent offenders serving 85% of their sentences.
- * **BYRNE ENFORCEMENT GRANTS** -- \$1 billion in the Trust Fund will help continue full funding for these grants, including South Carolina's \$6 million annual share.
- * **RURAL LAW ENFORCEMENT GRANTS** -- \$2.1 million for drug and crime enforcement in South Carolina's rural areas.
- * **DISCRETIONARY GRANTS** -- South Carolina's law enforcement agencies and courts may apply for:
 - ** \$1,000,000,000 -- Drug Court programs (treatment backed up by drug testing and certain punishment for non-violent offenders currently on probation.) Estimated \$14 million for South Carolina -- enough for about 7,000 offenders over six years.
 - ** \$320,000,000 -- Criminal record systems (Brady Law), communications equipment, and DNA testing; and
 - ** \$200,000,000 -- Judges, prosecutors and public defenders (estimated \$3 million for South Carolina).

PREVENTION PROGRAMS

- * **LOCAL PARTNERSHIP ACT** -- \$26 million in direct grants to cities and towns in South Carolina. Wide discretion permits local governments to use the dollars for education, drug treatment, and jobs programs.
- * **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT** -- \$11 million in grants for police, prosecutors and victims services; \$4.5 million in grants for shelters for battered women and their children; and South Carolina can apply for a share of \$500 million in several discretionary programs.
- * **AFTERSCHOOL AND IN-SCHOOL "SAFE HAVENS" FOR AT-RISK CHILDREN** -- \$14 million for non-profit, community-based organizations in South Carolina.
- * **DRUG TREATMENT IN PRISONS** -- \$6 million to treat up to an estimated 5,600 drug-addicted prisoners in South Carolina prisons over the next 6 years.
- * **LOCAL CRIME PREVENTION BLOCK GRANT** -- \$6.8 million in direct grants to cities and towns for various programs, including:
 - ** **ANTI-GANG GRANTS** -- to give young people positive alternatives to gangs, such as academic and athletic after-school activities, mentoring programs and scout troops.
 - ** **MIDNIGHT SPORTS LEAGUES** -- to give at-risk youth nightly alternatives to the streets, and for the U.S. Olympic Committee to develop supervised sports and recreation programs in high-crime areas.
 - ** **BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS** -- to establish clubs in low-income housing communities, and to encourage police officers to live in those communities.
 - ** **TRIAD** -- for partnerships between senior citizens groups, police chiefs and sheriffs to combat crimes against elderly Americans.
 - ** **POLICE PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHILDREN** -- for partnerships between law enforcement and social service agencies to fight crimes against children, and for the creation of youth councils to combat crime.
 - ** **VISITATION CENTERS** -- for supervised centers for divorced or separated parents to visit their children in "safe havens" when there is a history or risk of physical or sexual abuse.

- ** YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTERS -- to develop more effective education, training, research, prevention, diversion, treatment and rehabilitation programs for violent juveniles, including alternatives to school suspension and juvenile court diversion.**
- ** SAFE SENIORS CORRIDORS -- to provide older Americans with enhanced protection from crime by increasing police presence and crime prevention activities by community groups.**
- ** HOPE IN YOUTH -- to create Family Outreach Teams composed of youth, parents and school-parent organizers for mentoring, community organizing and peer counseling.**

*** DISCRETIONARY GRANTS -- State agencies and non-profit organizations may apply for a share of:**

- ** MODEL INTENSIVE GRANTS -- \$626 million for intensive, comprehensive and flexible aid to areas, urban and rural, hardest hit by crime and violence.**
- ** NATIONAL COMMUNITY ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP -- \$270 million to extend lines of credit of up to \$2 million to community development corporations to provide small, low-interest loans to businesses in low-income neighborhoods.**
- ** GANG RESISTANCE EDUCATION AND TRAINING ("GREAT") -- \$45 million for school-based programs to teach children to resist peer pressure and understand the negative impact of gangs and drugs.**
- ** URBAN RECREATION AND AT-RISK YOUTH -- \$4.5 million to expand recreational facilities in high-crime areas.**