

BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE FACT SHEET

STRENGTHENING THE MEDICAL EXAMINER-CORONER SYSTEM PROGRAM

Program Summary

The medicolegal death investigation (MDI) workforce is experiencing a national shortage of practicing, board-certified forensic pathologists. Furthermore, there is variability in the practice of death investigation across the United States, resulting in an inconsistent provision of MDI services. This program was initiated in 2017 to increase the number of practicing, board-certified forensic pathologists and strengthen the quality and consistency of medical examiner and coroner (ME/C) services to ensure equitable application of death investigation services.

Two purpose areas are funded under this program: 1) forensic pathology fellowships, and 2) medical examiner-coroner office accreditation.

Program Funding & Awards

Since 2017, this program has made 71 awards totaling \$10.4 million.

Fiscal Year	Fellowship (Purpose Area 1)		Accreditation (Purpose Area 2)	
	Number of Awards	Funds Awarded	Number of Awards	Funds Awarded
2017	7	\$795,184	7	\$1,536,896
2018	8	\$874,420	6	\$1,608,351
2019	8	\$998,892	7	\$832,531
2020	12	\$1,402,299	3	\$304,799
2021	8	\$1,433,917	5	\$616,083

Program Accomplishments

Fellowship/Purpose Area 1

- 44 fellowships funded by this program.
- 24 participants have completed fellowship training using program funds.
- 5,945 deaths were investigated by the program-funded fellows.
- 5,398 autopsies were performed by the program-funded fellows.

Accreditation/Purpose Area 2

- 80 individuals seeking certification using program funds.
- 16 individuals achieved certification using program funds.
- 8 organizations have achieved accreditation using program funds.

Please note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many grantees' program goals were delayed, especially with respect to accreditation. Also, many awards close prior to achieving accreditation, so that metric goes unreported.



Success Stories

Montgomery County, Texas: Thanks to the grant funds, the county was able to make the necessary improvements to a facility, increase storage capabilities with the purchase of a high-density mobile shelving unit, and send two death investigators to medicolegal death investigation training who subsequently achieved certification. The marked increase in caseload, internal staffing challenges, and continued changes in the death investigation process affected the county's ability to complete all of the goals within the timeframe; however, it is still on task to complete them.

Broward County, Florida: The fellow started on July 1, 2018, and successfully completed all phases of the program. She completed over 200 autopsies, attended training from the National Association of Medical Examiners and the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, as well as presented a well-received poster concerning a very rare cause of sudden death. In the spring, she attended courses on forensic anthropology, forensic botany, and forensic entomology. Over the course of the year, she consulted with and learned forensic toxicology from an in-house laboratory and board-certified PhD toxicologist. With the opioid epidemic, this was a lot to undertake and master, and she became well-versed in the properties, analysis, and interpretation of hundreds of prescription and nonprescription drugs. She received over 30 hours of training from the staff pathologist as well as hands-on training while doing cases. She was eventually hired as a staff forensic pathologist.

Learn More

For additional information about this program, see the ME/C System Program web page: <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/strengthening-mec/overview>.

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BJA helps America's state, local, and tribal jurisdictions reduce and prevent crime, lower recidivism, and promote a fair and safe criminal justice system. BJA provides a wide range of resources, including training and technical assistance, to law enforcement, courts and corrections agencies, treatment providers, reentry practitioners, justice information sharing professionals, and community-based partners to address chronic and emerging criminal justice challenges nationwide. To learn more about BJA, visit bja.ojp.gov or follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/DOJBJA) and Twitter ([@DOJBJA](https://twitter.com/DOJBJA)). BJA is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs.