

# BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE FACT SHEET

## STRENGTHENING THE MEDICAL EXAMINER-CORONER SYSTEM PROGRAM

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 and Awards

Since 2017, this program has made 84 awards totaling \$12.4 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
2022	7	\$1,378,459	6	\$662,695

### Program Accomplishments

#### Fellowship/Purpose Area 1

- 55 fellowships have been funded by this program.
- 30 participants have completed fellowship training using program funds.
- 8,333 deaths were investigated by the program-funded fellows.
- 8,102 autopsies were performed by the program-funded fellows.

#### Accreditation/Purpose Area 2

- 98 individuals have sought certification using program funds.
- 24 individuals achieved certification using program funds.
- 11 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

**Kittitas County Coroner's Office:** The portable X-ray machine funded under this award has truly been an asset to the office and their investigations. In the past, cases requiring X-rays had to be transported to a local hospital for imaging, at considerable expense to the office. As a result, the coroner's office was very selective when it came to scheduling cases for imaging.

Since they received the portable X-ray machine, they have enhanced their investigation to support their forensic pathologists by providing X-rays on any case in which it appears that X-rays would be advantageous to have. In several cases, their pathologist has been able to certify cause and manner of death by reviewing scene photos and X-rays, thereby avoiding a costly

autopsy that would have been required in the absence of the images. In a recent gunshot death, they were able to locate projectiles in an area they did not expect them to be found based upon their initial review of the wounds. This saved a considerable amount of time at autopsy.

Overall, having access to their own dedicated X-ray machine has enabled the coroner's office to perform better investigations with more accurate results while, at the same time, saving the county thousands of dollars in autopsy fees and hospital X-ray fees. The convenience of being able to obtain images at their facility without having to transport back and forth to the hospital is a great advantage as well.

## Learn More

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

## ABOUT BJA

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 grants, funding, and 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](https://bja.ojp.gov) or follow us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/DOJBJA](https://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.