

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 to strengthen the quality and consistency of medical examiner-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) ME/C office accreditation.

Program Funding and Awards

Since 2017, this program has made 98 awards totaling \$14.4 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
2023	6	\$1,350,000	8	\$700,000

Program Accomplishments

Fellowship/Purpose Area 1

- 58 fellowships have been funded by this program.
- 41 participants have completed fellowship training using program funds.
- 10,129 deaths were investigated by the program-funded fellows.
- 11,162 autopsies were performed by the program-funded fellows.

Accreditation/Purpose Area 2

- 107 individuals have sought certification using program funds.
- 25 individuals achieved certification using program funds.
- 13 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.



Grantee Spotlight and Program Highlights

New York Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (NY OCME)

NY OCME serves a population of approximately 8.5 million people in an area of 300 square miles that encompasses the city's five boroughs. The office has more than 30 full-time forensic pathologists and has trained an average of four forensic pathology fellows every year for more than 30 years. A recent grant award from the BJA's ME/C Program has allowed the NYC OCME to accommodate up to six forensic pathology fellows each year.

The NYC OCME's reputation within the forensic pathology community as a consistently strong training program enables it to draw applicants from around the country and the world. Locally, the NYC OCME partners with seven regional medical schools and more than 10 regional pathology residency programs to educate a large pool of future doctors and pathologists about the unique intersection of science and medicine in forensic pathology. A limited number of summer internships hosted by the NYC OCME encourages college students to consider careers in the forensic sciences, and some of these interns even return as forensic pathology fellows years later after completing college, medical school, and a pathology residency.

Forensic pathology fellows perform over 200 autopsies of various complexity, attend daily conferences with senior medical examiners to discuss cases with a strong emphasis on the principles behind the practice of forensic pathology, teach students and residents, and gain experience testifying in grand juries and criminal trials. Over the last 30 years, the NYC OCME's forensic pathology training program has successfully graduated more than 100 forensic pathologists, most of whom have continued to practice forensic pathology full-time in and beyond New York City.

The 2023 Forensic Pathology Match Program Update

Of the 46 U.S. accredited forensic pathology fellowship programs (78 total positions), 40 programs participated in the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) National Resident Matching Program (NRMP), offering a total of 70 positions. The Match was held on May 3rd, 2023 for positions starting in July, 2024. There were 47 match applicants and all but two applicants matched (i.e., 95.7% applicants matched). 50% of the forensic pathology (FP) programs in the Match filled, and 64% of the positions filled. The application numbers are similar to recent years in that a handful of positions this year were available outside of the match. The data indicates there is not a shortage of FP fellowship positions but rather a shortage of applicants. A survey of the fellow applicants (55% response rate) was conducted by NAME. This survey found that 4 of 5 residents matched with their first choice and 88% were "definitely" satisfied with their match outcome. The next FP match date is scheduled for May 1, 2024 for July 2025 positions.

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 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.