

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 help address MDI workforce needs to increase the number of practicing board-certified forensic pathologists as medical examiner and coroner (ME/C) offices need to implement and follow quality standards and performance criteria in an effort to provide consistent and equitable application of death investigation services.

Program Goals

Two purpose areas are funded under this program:

1. Forensic pathology fellowships
2. Medical examiner/coroner office accreditation

The goals of these purpose areas are to:

- Contribute to increasing the supply of trained, board-certified forensic pathology practitioners.
- Strengthen the quality and consistency of ME/C services in their respective office, thus increasing public trust in these services.

Program Funding & Awards

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

Since 2017, this program has made 58 awards totaling \$8.35 million.

Program Accomplishments

Fellowship/Purpose Area 1

- 39 fellowships have been funded by this program.
- 15 participants have completed fellowship training using program funds.
- 2,306 deaths were investigated by the program-funded fellows.
- 2,217 autopsies were performed by the program-funded fellows.

Accreditation/Purpose Area 2

- 73 individuals have sought certification using program funds.
- 12 individuals have achieved certification using program funds.

Success Stories

The autopsy performance by the fellow reduced the overall caseload average for the full-time forensic pathologists, helping to keep them below 325 annual autopsies, preserving critical criteria that must be met for NAME accreditation. The fellowship was an affordable and cost-effective approach to solving concerns regarding record autopsy numbers, as well as by bolstering forensic pathology of the future, by providing two well-trained forensic pathologists to an undermanned field.

~Montgomery County Coroner's Office, Ohio

With the hiring of this fellow, MCMEO was able to increase the number of autopsies performed by 6 percent when compared with the 12 months prior and allowed the office to offer support to surrounding jurisdictions in need of forensic autopsy services. During this timeframe, MCMEO was able to provide autopsy support to 14 other jurisdictions, which is an increase of more than 100 percent from years prior.

~Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office

- Three organizations have achieved accreditation using program funds.

*Please note that due to COVID-19, many grantees' program goals were delayed, especially with respect to accreditation.

Additional Resources

- BJA Strengthening the ME/C System Web Page: <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/strengthening-mec/overview>
- Subscribe: <https://bja.ojp.gov/subscribe>

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