

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 112 awards totaling \$16.4 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	\$1,498,412	5	\$551,588
2022	7	\$1,378,459	6	\$662,695
2023	6	\$1,350,000	8	\$700,000
2024	6	\$1,270,325	8	\$677,175

Program Accomplishments

Fellowship/Purpose Area 1

- 64 fellowships have been funded by this program.
- 49 participants have completed fellowship training using program funds.
- 11,798 deaths were investigated by the program-funded fellows.
- 12,893 autopsies were performed by the program-funded fellows.

Accreditation/Purpose Area 2

- 148 individuals have sought certification using program funds.
- 31 individuals achieved certification using program funds.
- 15 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.



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Grantee Spotlight and Program Highlights

Office of the Medical Examiner, District 19, Florida

On November 18, 2022, in conjunction with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice, Strengthening the Medical Examiner-Coroner (ME/C) System Program Grant, the Office of the Medical Examiner, District 19 (OME-19), Florida became a fully accredited agency by the National Association of Medical Examiner's (NAME). Since only twelve of the twenty-five districts in the state are NAME accredited, the OME-19 is particularly proud of this accomplishment. Through hard work, dedication, planning, and the assistance of this grant, the OME-19, in a short period of time, was able to turn what was thought to be something unachievable (due to building and financial constraints) to something successfully achieved.

Marion County Coroner's Office, IN

The Marion County Coroner's Office has a unique fellowship program through their partnership with Indiana University School of Medicine, which significantly enhances the education, training, and experience of forensic pathologists. This partnership is being utilized to develop a pipeline of future forensic pathologists by encouraging undergraduate and medical students to consider the area of forensic pathology as they make career decisions. Marion County's efforts are critical to addressing the national shortage of forensic pathologists by not only focusing on training fellows, but also recruiting students into the field.

Furthermore, Marion County Coroner's Office is the only county in Indiana that has an accredited forensic fellowship program. The Marion County Coroner's Office was awarded funds through the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Strengthening the Medical Examiner-Coroner System (MEC) program to

support the training of a forensic pathology fellow in their office. The office was awarded BJA fellowship funding at the beginning of the COVID pandemic. COVID significantly impacted the case load and the office's ability to conduct investigations, creating a challenge for the office's operation. During that time, county death investigations increased, and the office lost several critical staff, including pathologists and investigators. Internally, the office also faced a lack of funding from the county to keep up with staffing needed to adequately conduct death investigations. The BJA funded fellow performed 250 autopsies, which greatly assisted the staff forensic pathologists with the increased autopsy case load. The fellow graduated the program, became board certified, and now works in a Coroner's Office in Ohio.

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 X (@DOJBJA). BJA is a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs.