**CFSO**

**Fiscal Year 2026 Appropriations Priorities**

**Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies**

**DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE- (FUNDING REQUESTS)**

1. **PAUL COVERDELL FORENSIC SCIENCE GRANT
Agency:** DOJ/Office of Justice Programs
**Request**: ***Fund Coverdell at $50 million without the carve-out for “Forensic Support for Opioid and Synthetic Drug Investigations”*Explanation**: The Paul Coverdell grants are the only dedicated funds available from the Federal government for non-DNA forensics science and for Medical Examiners/Coroners. Current levels of Coverdell funding are not enough to address the significant need in the United States.  The Coverdell grants support every forensic science discipline other than DNA analysis and as such these funds are spread across not only 495 labs but also numerous disciplines such as fingerprints and firearms.  Backlogs of these disciplines are increasing dramatically but the funding is not. Specifically, the average annual growth in forensic science backlogs in the United States from 2017 to 2023 was up 13% according to West Virginia Universities Project Foresight. Coverdell funding is also available to medical examiner and coroner offices, which further increases the number of eligible applicants and decreases the allocation to each provider.  The lack of funding is even more dramatic to the Medical Examiner/Coroners due to the shortage of forensic pathologists. Further, the Opioid Crisis has overwhelmed the system. **With a $17m carve out only $18m is left for 435 crime labs and 800 medical examiners, this funding is stretched thin.**
2. **CARA (Comprehensive Opioid Use Reduction Activities)
Agency:** DOJ/Office of Justice Programs
**Request**: Carve-out $20m for forensics support for opioid and synthetic drug investigations
**Explanation**: In 2020, a third of the requests received by publicly funded crime labs stemmed from controlled substances according to the 2020 DOJ Census of Crime Labs yet the funding to address this dramatic increase in case work is insufficient. While some labs can get CARA funds it is akin to Byrne and the number is not significant. In the past there has been a carve-out of the Paul Coverdell forensic grants to address this but the effect of this is that it leaves only $17m for non-DNA (firearms, fingerprints etc.) casework across 495 public laboratories. As such, we request a carve-out of CARA for forensic support. For example, from 1/1/21 to 12/31/21 an estimated 712,130 distinct drug cases were submitted to State and local laboratories in the US. From those cases, an estimated 1,326,205 drug reports were identified.
3. **BYRNE JAG-PATTERN EVIDENCE**

**Agency**: DOJ/Office of Justice Programs

**Request**: Carve out $10m from the Byrne JAG grants for Pattern Evidence.

**Explanation**: (see report language below)

1. **OTHER**: CFSO supports the FY26 request for Debbie Smith, NamUs, SAKI and in Other Federal, State, and Local Forensic Activities

**DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE- (LANGUAGE REQUESTS)**

1. **BYRNE JAG-PATTERN EVIDENCE**

**Request**: Carve out $10m from Byrne JAG to be dedicated to law enforcement agencies for pattern evidence

**Agency:** DOJ/Office of Justice Programs/

**Title**: Pattern Evidence Backlog Reduction

**Description:** Report Language

**Language Type**: Report

**Proposed Language**: With the advances in forensic science and technology over the years, forensic laboratories have been able to develop, recover and identify evidence such as fingerprints and footwear impressions that were previously undetectable. Therefore, with the ever-increasing success rates and identifications, the submission of items not previously submitted along with those that have been historically submitted for examination have been exponentially increasing creating backlogs and increased turnaround times. As such, the Committee directs the Attorney General to prioritize grants for pattern evidence in Byrne JAG. (carve out $5)

**DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE- (FUNDING REQUEST)**

1. **Forensic SDO**

**Request**: $1.5m for the forensic Standard Development Organizations (already authorized)

**Agency:** Commerce/NIST/OSAC

**Type of Request:** Funding

**Explanation**: This program was authorized in the CHIPS Act and was not funded by the Department of Commerce or NIST. The standards for the state and local community developed by the OSAC require a final step for the creation and distribution of consensus standards. Unlike private industries, forensic standards are used by the federal, state, county, and local governments and as such do not have the funding to purchase the standards. The $1.5m allows for the final stage of development and distribution of these standards to the public sector without charge.

**NOTE**:

The TRANQ Act passed in the 118th Congress. We fully support funding of this program.

**LANGUAGE INCLUDED IN THE FY25 REPORT**

1. **INTEROPERABILITY**

**Request**: Include report language regarding interoperability of AFIS.

A**gency**: DOJ/Office of Justice Programs/State and Local Law Enforcement

**Title:** Interoperability of Automated Biometric Identification Systems

**Description**: Report language

**Language Type**: Report

**Proposed Language**: “*The Committee is concerned with the continued lack of a solution to the interoperability of various Automated Biometric Identification Systems. Unlike DNA there is no single federal database or repository to search for latent prints. The Committee further understands that NIST and NIJ have spent a significant amount of time working on this matter, but no solution has been found. The Committee directs the DOJ and NIST to provide an update of work done to date to resolve this matter, the barriers to creating a federal database and a path forward.”*

**Explanation:** Federal leadership is critical in developing a strategic plan for a single national fingerprint database that is searchable by all public forensic science providers. Automated Biometric Identification Systems (ABIS) have been in use since the mid-1980s, electronically searching fingerprint and other biometric records for criminal/terrorist suspect identification, criminal history reporting, forensic investigations, and civil background checks. Presently, there is no nationally mandated minimum interoperability standard among ABIS system providers to ensure systems can communicate ensuring reliability, quality/suitability, timeliness, and accuracy of inquiries. Due to a lack of a national interoperability standard ABIS Systems at the state level and below, for the most part, cannot perform searches in neighboring jurisdictions, potentially allowing a wanted individual to go unidentified, risking a public safety or even more dire national security risk.

1. **FORENSIC R&D/MEDICAL EXAMINERS**

**Request:** Include report language regarding Medical Examiners/Coroners

**Agency:** DOJ/NIJ

**Title:** Medical Examiner and Coroner (ME/C) Research Needs

**Language Type:** Report

**Proposed Language:** “*The Committee understands that there is a lack of research and development being conducted to assist medical examiners and coroners. For example, medical examiners and coroners are at the frontline of the drug crisis and can identify trends of new and emerging drugs. Despite their role in public health, there has been little effort to allow for research to help identify and classify emerging drugs. As such, the Committee strongly recommends NIJ include toxicology of emerging drugs to their research priorities. In addition, there are other areas including research related to in-custody deaths, advanced infant and child death investigation, the use of postmortem forensic radiology (CT Scans), and point of care rapid toxicology testing that are at the fore front of ME/C concerns.”*

**Explanation:** Medical examiners and coroners lack access to funding for research regarding several public health and criminal justice concerns. Research opportunities need to be created and funded for ME/C offices that are not associated with an academic institution. Data obtained during ME/C investigations impact national epidemiological statistics, public health efforts to prevent deaths, and the criminal and civil legal systems. Research is needed to ensure that the data provided is scientifically valid. For example, medical examiners and coroners need accurate and comprehensive toxicology testing to properly certify an intoxication death. If the toxicology laboratory is unable to detect a new drug, the intoxication death may be missed. This will lead to inaccurate vital statistic records and prevent medical caregivers from knowing what drugs are in their community which may affect treatment decisions.

1. **ACCREDITATION**

**Request:** Include language in Byrne that laboratory accreditation for small forensic service providers and CSI’s should be a priority in forensic grants.

**Agency:** DOJ/OJP

**Title:** Forensic Science Laboratory Accreditation

**Language Type:** Report

**Proposed Language:** The Committee is concerned that despite the majority of forensic service providers being accredited there remain a few small providers that lack the resources to become accredited. The Committee applauds the Department of Justice and the larger State labs with the mentoring of these labs but is concerned with the barriers that remain. As such, the Committee directs the DOJ to prioritize grants for small forensic service providers and crime scene investigators when evaluating forensic responses in Byrne JAG grants.

**Explanation**: Only 64% of forensic providers with fewer than 10 employees are accredited and Crime Scene Investigative (CSI’s) units are not eligible for forensic grants for accreditation.

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