



*American Academy of Forensic Sciences
American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors
International Association for Identification
International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners
National Association of Medical Examiners
Society of Forensic Toxicologists*

Increasing Paul Coverdell Grant Funding to Strengthen Forensic Science Infrastructure (Sustained Federal Investment in Non-DNA Forensic Science and Medical Examiner/Coroner Services)

The Problem:

The **Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program** is the federal government's primary source of dedicated funding to improve the quality, timeliness, and reliability of forensic science and medical examiner/coroner (ME/C) services. Unlike federal DNA-specific grant programs, Coverdell supports the full spectrum of forensic disciplines that are essential to the day-to-day operation of the criminal justice system.

As crime laboratories and ME/C offices face growing caseloads, workforce shortages, aging infrastructure, and increasing demands from the opioid crisis and digital evidence, current funding levels are no longer sufficient to meet national needs. Increasing annual appropriations for the Coverdell Program is a cost-effective investment that will strengthen forensic capacity, improve public safety, and enhance the administration of justice.

The nation's forensic science system is operating under sustained pressure from:

- Rising evidence submissions and increasingly complex casework
- Expanded digital evidence and cyber-enabled investigations
- Increased toxicology testing and medicolegal death investigations associated with opioid epidemic
- Workforce shortages across forensic laboratories and ME/C offices
- Growing costs for accreditation, quality assurance, and technology modernization

The National Institute of Justice's Needs Assessment of Forensic Laboratories and Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices identified a substantial funding gap that continues to limit the ability of forensic service providers to meet operational demands.

Key Findings:

- **\$640 million** is needed annually to support baseline forensic laboratory and ME/C operations.
- The opioid crisis adds an estimated **\$270 million** in annual costs, creating an overall resource gap of approximately **\$910 million** each year.
- Since FY 2002, the Coverdell Program has supported **more than 1,700 grants totaling nearly \$400 million**, demonstrating its longstanding value to state and local forensic agencies.
- In FY 2023, the program awarded only **\$31.3 million**—far below documented national needs.

Why Coverdell Matters:

The Coverdell Program is uniquely flexible, allowing states and local jurisdictions to address the forensic disciplines that most directly affect public safety and case outcomes, including: Controlled substances, Toxicology, Firearms and toolmark examination, Latent print analysis, Digital evidence, Trace evidence, Questioned documents, Forensic pathology and medicolegal death investigation, laboratory accreditation, quality assurance, workforce development, and technology modernization. This flexibility enables jurisdictions to respond to emerging challenges while maintaining scientifically reliable forensic services.

Policy Recommendation:

Congress should increase annual appropriations for the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program to provide sustained, predictable funding for non-DNA forensic science and medicolegal death investigation services. Expanded investment will help laboratories and ME/C offices reduce backlogs, modernize technology, strengthen the forensic workforce, maintain accreditation, and improve the timely delivery of scientifically sound forensic evidence.

A stronger Coverdell Program will enhance public safety, improve the efficiency of the justice system, support accurate criminal investigations, protect against wrongful convictions, and ensure that victims and communities receive timely and reliable forensic services.