



JANUARY 2008

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE REPORT

Fiscal Year 2006 Report on the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program

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The Paul Coverdell Forensic Sciences Improvement Grants Program provides funding to crime laboratories and medical examiner offices through a two-part process consisting of "Base" and "Competitive" funding. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2006, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) made a total of 87 Coverdell awards. These consisted of 43 "Base" awards to State Administering Agencies (SAAs), 34 "Competitive" awards to units of local government, and 10 combination "Base" and "Competitive" awards to SAAs.

According to the Coverdell Act, seventy-five percent (75%) of the total program amount must be awarded to states through State Administering Agencies based on individual state population. These "Base" awards are dispersed as formula grants to all eligible SAAs who apply for funding. SAAs from all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and five U.S. territories are eligible to apply for "Base" funding.

Twenty-five percent (25%) of the total program amount must be dedicated to the program's "Competitive" component. These "Competitive" funds may be awarded to SAAs and they can be dispersed directly to units of local government.

On November 22, 2005, President Bush signed into law the Science, State, Justice, Commerce, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2006 (Pub. L. No. 109-108). The Act appropriated \$18.5 million to the U.S. Department of Justice for Paul Coverdell Forensic Sciences Improvement Grants under Part BB of Title I of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. § 3797j et seq.).

An amount of \$1.5 million (\$1,480,842 post-rescission) was congressionally directed for the National Academy of Sciences to conduct a study on forensic science, as described in the Senate report (H. Rpt. 109-272, conference report for H.R. 2862). Additionally, \$398,152 was awarded to the National Forensic Science Technology Center to support the Grant Progress Assessment Program, which enables NIJ to monitor the progress of Coverdell grant recipients. After rescissions and other program maintenance expenses, a total of \$15,174,131 was available for awards to States and units of local government in FY 2006.

On April 18, 2006, NIJ announced that it was seeking applications for funding under the FY 2006 Paul Coverdell Forensic Sciences Improvement Grants Program. In response to the announcement, NIJ received 177 applications for funding. Of these, 53 States and territories applied for "Base" funding. Additionally, 148 applications (24 States/territories and 124 units of local government) were received for "Competitive" funding.

The Justice for All Act of 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-405, § 311(b) (codified at 42 U.S.C. § 3797k) placed an eligibility requirement on Coverdell applicants. The Act requires applicants to certify that a government entity exists and an appropriate process is in place to conduct independent external investigations into allegations of serious negligence or misconduct by laboratory personnel. "Competitive" funding applications that did not include this certification were deemed non-responsive and therefore were not considered for funding. The Justice for All Act also added a general forensic backlog reduction component to the Coverdell Program.

The 148 applications for "Competitive" funding were reviewed by an independent panel made up of subject-matter experts from the forensic science community. The panelists reviewed and rated the proposals based on specific evaluation criteria. Based on the recommendations of the peer review panel and available funding, NIJ made 44 "Competitive" awards.

Prior to the close of FY 2006, NIJ made 87 awards totaling \$14,821,048. In accordance with the Coverdell Act, \$11,380,598 (75% of the FY 2006 available appropriation) was allocated to the "Base" funding portion and \$3,793,533 (25% of the FY 2006 available appropriation) was allocated to the "Competitive" funding portion.

The State of Nevada, the American Samoa, and the Northern Mariana Islands did not submit a request for "Base" funding; resulting in a balance of \$164,135 in unallocated "Base" funds. Reallocating this to the 53 States would have resulted in a very minimal increase in their budget. Additionally, each would have been required to resubmit budget revisions to incorporate these funds. Therefore, remaining funds were rolled over into the "Base" funding component for the 2007 Coverdell Program. Similarly, \$16,219 of "Competitive" funds remained after 44 "Competitive" awards were made. Due to the relatively small amount of residual "Competitive" funds, the balance was rolled over for distribution in the "Competitive" portion of the FY 2007 Coverdell Program.

NIJ is pleased to report, that as a result of the increased Coverdell Program appropriation from Congress in FY 2006, NIJ was able to increase the Coverdell Program minimum "Base" award to the States and territories from \$82,639 in FY 2005 to \$91,015 in FY 2006, while maintaining the maximum "Competitive" award at \$95,000.