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REPORT

Fiscal Year 2005 Report on the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program

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The Paul Coverdell Forensic Science 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) 2005, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) made a total of 92 Coverdell awards. These consisted of 45 "Base" awards to State Administering Agencies (SAAs), 42 "Competitive" awards to units of local government, and 5 combination "Base" and "Competitive" awards to SAAs.

According to the Coverdell program, 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 December 8, 2004, President Bush signed into law the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005 (Pub. L. No. 108-447). This Act appropriated \$15 million to the U.S. Department of Justice for the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants program. After rescissions and other program maintenance expenses, a total of \$13,773,089 in Coverdell funds was available to be awarded in FY 2005.

In accordance with the Coverdell program, \$10,329,817 (75% of the FY 2005 available appropriation) was allocated to the "Base" funding portion and \$3,443,272 was allocated to the "Competitive" funding portion.

On April 21, 2005, NIJ publicly announced the FY 2005 Coverdell program. In response to the announcement, NIJ received 223 applications for funding. Of these, 52 states and territories applied for "Base" funding. Additionally, 200 applications (29 states/territories and 171 units of local government) were received for "Competitive" funding.

The 200 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 and presented their recommendations to NIJ. These recommendations were ranked and forwarded to the NIJ Director for review. Based on the panel recommendations and funding availability, the NIJ Director was able to fund 42 "Competitive" proposals.

NIJ is pleased to report some noteworthy improvements in the Coverdell program that were a direct result of the increased appropriation from Congress in FY 2005. NIJ was able to increase the minimum "Base" award amount to the states and territories from \$42,789 in FY 2004 to \$82,639 in FY 2005. On the "Competitive" side, the increased appropriation allowed NIJ to raise the maximum award amount for "Competitive" awards from \$80,000 in FY 2004 to \$95,000 in FY 2005. NIJ received 40 more "Competitive" proposals than it received in FY 2004 and was able to make 16 more "Competitive" awards to units of local government than it did in FY 2004.

In addition, the Justice for All Act of 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-405, section 311(b) (codified at 42 U.S.C. § 3797k) placed a new eligibility requirement on Coverdell applicants and added a general forensic backlog reduction component to the Coverdell program. 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.

As a result of this new certification requirement, NIJ was not able to award FY 2005 Coverdell funds to the Territory of Guam and the State of Maine. Officials in Guam, after consulting with the Office of Justice Programs, Office of General Counsel, decided that they could not meet the requirements contained in the certification. The State of Maine was not eligible to receive FY 2005 Coverdell funds because the State's original application did not include any of the required certifications. Additionally, the State did not respond to NIJ's June 30, 2005, request to all applicants to resubmit the required certification concerning the independent, external investigation nor did it respond to NIJ's July 18, 2005, correspondence sent to those applicants that had not yet re-submitted the certification.