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REPORT

Fiscal Year 2013 Report on the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program

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Section 2806(b) of Public L. 90-351, the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, as amended, mandates the submission of a report to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate concerning grants made under the Paul Coverdell National Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program in each fiscal year. This letter responds to that requirement.

The Paul Coverdell National Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program, managed by the Office of Justice Programs' National Institute of Justice (NIJ), provides funding to States and units of local government to improve the quality and timeliness of forensic science and medical examiner services, in accordance with the Coverdell Act. For the purposes of the Act, the District of Columbia and the five U.S. territories are considered States. NIJ executes the Coverdell Grants Program through a grant solicitation that has both a formula and a competitive component. Only States are eligible to apply for the formula component.

The Coverdell Act requires that 75 percent of the total program funds be awarded to States through State Administering Agencies (SAAs). These "Base" awards are based on the State's population and made to all eligible SAAs that apply. The Coverdell Act requires that the remaining 25 percent of program funds be awarded competitively. These "Competitive" funds may be awarded to SAAs or dispersed directly to units of local government based on the merits of the respective applications. States and local governments that provide forensic science or medical examiner services may apply for the competitive funding.

Applications for competitive funding are reviewed by an independent panel made up of subject matter experts from the forensic science community. The panelists review and rate the applications individually based on specific evaluation criteria specified in the solicitation.

On March 18, 2013, NIJ released the solicitation seeking applications for funding under the Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program. NIJ received 196 applications; 29 States applied for base funding and 25 States applied for a combination of base and competitive funding. The remaining 143 applications were received from units of local government for competitive funding. Twenty-six applications were denied due to various circumstances such as duplicate applications, failure to meet basic minimum requirements, and non-responsiveness to solicitation criteria.

NIJ made 70 awards totaling \$9,687,157; 50 States received base awards, 4 States received a combination of base and competitive awards, and 16 units of local government received competitive awards.

In its administration of the Coverdell Program since 2002, NIJ monitors each award to ensure compliance with federal statutes, regulations, and policies to ensure that federal funds are used appropriately. This monitoring includes diligent review of Coverdell grantees' budgets to ensure they are in accord with the work promised in the grant application and consistent with Coverdell Program statutory and policy requirements.

| Fiscal Year | Minimum Base Award | Annual Decrease |
|-------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| 2013 | \$ 58,186 | 8% |
| 2012 | \$ 63,517 | 62% |
| 2011 | \$166,108 | 17% |
| 2010 | \$199,728 | |

Since its inception, the Coverdell Program has resulted in 1001 grants to States and units of local government. Indeed, this past year (FY 2013) saw the largest maximum competitive award yet (\$175,000) to improve the nation's quality and timeliness forensic services. It is important to note, however, that funding of base awards to States and territories has dropped precipitously since 2010.

The 70 percent reduction in minimum base awards in just three years is likely to impact the nation's public safety and administration of justice, including:

- Greater backlogs of evidence awaiting testing by crime laboratories;
- Less forensic casework being completed;
- Increased workload for crime lab staff;
- Greater difficulty in meeting mandatory training and education requirements for lab accreditation; and
- More challenges in staying abreast of and using the most current technological advancements.

NIJ is grateful for the opportunity to help improve the quality and timeliness of forensic science and medical examiner services throughout the nation's communities. We look forward to continuing these efforts through important programs such as the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program.

View FY 2013 Coverdell funds awarded to State Administering Agencies and to units of local government within those states:

<https://nij.gov/funding/pages/funding-detail.aspx?solicitationid=3365>

The table includes funding amounts and a short program description for each award.