



Legislation Text

File #: 23-0434, **Version:** 1

Department: Institute of Forensic Sciences

Department Head/Elected Official: Luis A. Sanchez, M.D., Executive Director & Chief Medical Examiner

Regular or Supplemental RCA: Regular RCA

Type of Request: Grant

Project ID (if applicable): CJD #4691301

Vendor/Entity Legal Name (if applicable): N/A

MWDBE Contracted Goal (if applicable): N/A

MWDBE Current Participation (if applicable): N/A

Justification for 0% MWDBE Participation Goal: N/A - Goal not applicable to request

Request Summary (Agenda Caption):

Request by the Institute of Forensic Sciences for approval to submit an application to the Office of the Governor/Criminal Justice Division for grant funds in the amount of \$128,787, with no required match, for the FY 2024 Criminal Justice Grant Program.

Background and Discussion:

Our Firearms Identification laboratory provides service to over 30 law enforcement agencies in Harris County. The laboratory processes predominantly two types of cases. The first are “comparison cases,” where fired evidence items such as bullets and/or cartridge cases are microscopically compared to each other to determine if they were fired from the same unknown weapon or to test fired items to determine if they were fired from a particular weapon. The second case type are guns recovered with no fired evidence for comparison. The National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) is a national database of digital images of cartridge cases that were found at crime scenes and test-fired from confiscated weapons. These images can be searched against each other for possible matches, potentially linking one gun to multiple crimes. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) manages this system and provides the Integrated Ballistic Identification System (IBIS) imaging equipment to crime labs around the country. Guns collected for this purpose are test-fired and the resulting cartridge cases are imaged using the IBIS equipment for entry into the NIBIN database. The minimum required operating standards for NIBIN access mandate that 80% of these test fires must be imaged within 20 business days from submission to the laboratory in order to meet the basic standard for compliance. Our laboratory has been able to maintain basic compliance with this standard but continues to see significantly higher numbers of case submissions as well as increases in the number of firearms and firearms related evidence items submitted with each case. Firearms case submissions increased more than 25% between 2019 and 2020 and greater than 65% from 2019 to 2021 and 2022. Firearms examiner training is a multi-year endeavor and the increase in case submissions has outpaced our ability to train additional staff. This, in addition to a sluggish hiring market in the Firearms discipline throughout the U.S., has caused continuing increases in both turnaround time and backlogs for all Firearms case types. To this end, we are requesting \$52,786.80 to provide overtime to our current 11 analysts and technicians to aid in reducing the backlog and turnaround time for both comparison and test fire cases.

Our Drug Chemistry laboratory performs services that identify confiscated, illegal and dangerous drugs in Harris County, outside the city limits of Houston. The laboratory receives ~6,500-7,500 drug cases per year, nearly all of which are presumptively screened using Gas Chromatograph-Flame Ionization Detection (GC-FID) instruments. The laboratory has six GC-FID instruments to keep up with the current caseload, two of which are nearing the end of their service life. In this part of our program, we are requesting \$76,000 for the purchase of two new GC-FID instruments to replace the two older units. Once these instruments reach the end of their service life, they are no longer supported by the manufacturer and repairs and maintenance fees become too costly to support the daily throughput of 80-100 samples per day per instrument. Replacement is the only cost-effective way to maintain current service levels for seized drug cases.

Expected Impact:

The Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences Crime Laboratory expects to achieve two goals with this program: (1) provide overtime for firearms analysts to reduce backlogs and turnaround times; and (2) replace two aging GC-FIDs that are used to screen forensic drug samples.

Alternative Options:

There are few, if any, alternative options for this program.

Alignment with Goal(s):

- ☒ Justice and Safety
- ☐ Economic Opportunity
- ☐ Housing
- ☐ Public Health
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Flooding
- ☐ Environment
- ☐ Governance and Customer Service

Prior Court Action (if any):

Date	Agenda Item #	Action Taken
N/A	N/A	N/A

Location:

Address (if applicable): 1861 Old Spanish Trail, Houston, TX 77054

Precinct(s): Countywide

Fiscal and Personnel Summary			
Service Name	Criminal Justice Grant Program, FY2024 (Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant)		
	FY 23	FY 24	Next 3 FYs
Incremental Expenditures (do NOT write values in thousands or millions)			
Labor Expenditures	\$	\$52,786.80	\$

Non-Labor Expenditures	\$	\$76,000.00	\$
Total Incremental Expenditures	\$	\$128,786.80	\$
Funding Sources (do NOT write values in thousands or millions)			
Existing Budget			
Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$
Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$
Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$
Total Current Budget	\$	\$	\$
Additional Budget Requested			
Grant	\$	\$128,786.80	\$
Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$
Choose an item.	\$	\$	\$
Total Additional Budget Requested	\$	\$	\$
Total Funding Sources	\$	\$128,786.80	\$
Personnel (Fill out section only if requesting new PCNs)			
Current Position Count for Service	-	-	-
Additional Positions Requested	-	-	-
Total Personnel	-	-	-

Anticipated Court Date: January 31, 2023

Anticipated Implementation Date (if different from Court date): October 1, 2023

Emergency/Disaster Recovery Note: Not an emergency, disaster, or COVID-19 related item

Contact(s) name, title, department: Robin Alewine, Grant Analyst, Institute of Forensic Sciences

Attachments (if applicable): Order, Resolution, Application