



June 2010

In the Spotlight

Wrongful Conviction Review Program

Improving confidence in the justice system and ensuring equal justice for all have always been core values of the Department of Justice. Well-publicized cases in recent years and research from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) have confirmed that the reliability of certain types of evidence and evidence collection methods must be carefully examined throughout the adjudications process, including during the post-conviction phase. In FY 2009, through an appropriation from Congress, BJA implemented a new grant program to provide high-quality and efficient representation for defendants involved in capital cases with post-conviction claims of innocence. Post-conviction innocence claims addressed by this program are likely to include complex challenges to the reliability or accuracy of evidence presented at trial which fall mainly into three categories: 1) eyewitness identification evidence; 2) confession evidence; and 3) forensic evidence. In some cases, post-conviction DNA testing alone can settle such claims, but some may require DNA testing together with additional proof and/or expert testimony, which may be extremely costly. The goals of this initiative are to: 1) provide quality representation to the wrongfully convicted; 2) alleviate burdens placed on the criminal justice system through costly and prolonged post-conviction litigation; and 3) identify, when possible, the actual perpetrator of the crime.

In FY 2009, BJA made [11 grant awards](#) to non-profit organizations dedicated to exonerating the innocent, and to public defender offices with in-house post-conviction review programs. BJA also awarded a national training and technical assistance grant to the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL) to work collaboratively with the funded public and non-profit entities to support their ability to competently and efficiently litigate post-conviction claims of innocence. BJA has continued this program in FY 2010 and is currently reviewing applications received. Awards will be announced by October 1, 2010.

News You Can Use

Register Now for APPA's 35th Annual Training Institute

The American Probation & Parole Association's 35th Annual Training Institute will be held August 15-18, 2010, in Washington, DC. The training will feature more than 90 workshops for the community corrections field, providers of correctional products or services, or those in academia, social work, mental health, or a direct client-service field. [More](#)

Cost-Benefit Knowledge Bank Under Development

Few jurisdictions know what return on investment they are getting for their criminal justice system expenditures. Assumptions are made about the financial and substantive effects of policy and program choices, without much solid information on the real costs or benefits incurred. Yet this information is highly relevant to the decisions policymakers and practitioners need to make, particularly in the current challenging fiscal climate. To address this gap, BJA has funded the Vera Institute of Justice to build a national knowledge bank for cost-benefit analysis in criminal justice, which will help practitioners and policymakers better understand the economic pros and cons associated with criminal justice investments. For more information, go to www.vera.org/topics/cba.

Grants & Funding

BJA has released the following solicitations:

- [Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant \(JAG\) Program: Local Solicitation](#)
Release date: April 26, 2010
Applications due: June 30, 2010
- [John R. Justice Grant Program](#)
Release date: May 26, 2010
Applications due: July 27, 2010

For other funding opportunities, please go to: www.ojp.gov/funding/solicitations.htm.

Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Program

Enacted in 1976, the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Program provides death, disability, and education benefits to those eligible for the program. For details regarding these federal benefits for law enforcement officers, firefighters, and first responders killed or catastrophically disabled in the line of duty, call the PSOB Office toll-free at 888-744-6513 or 202-307-0635, or visit the PSOB [web site](#).

DID YOU KNOW?

State and local public defenders and prosecutors as well as federal public defenders, are eligible for law school loan repayment assistance through BJA. In the current economy, both prosecutor and public defender offices find it difficult to attract and retain talented attorneys. Acknowledging this challenge, Congress enacted the John R. Justice Prosecutors and Defenders Incentive Act to encourage qualified attorneys to choose careers as prosecutors and public defenders and to continue in that service. The John R. Justice Program provides loan repayment assistance for local and state prosecutors and public defenders as well as federal public defenders who agree to remain employed as such for at least three years. [More](#)

FEATURED PROGRAM

In 2005, pursuant to Congressional appropriations and to address the need for greater training for prosecutors and defenders handling death penalty cases, BJA developed and funded the Capital Case Litigation Initiative (CCLI). CCLI, like nearly every BJA initiative, was designed by a focus group of state and local practitioners and aims to improve the quality of representation and the reliability of verdicts in state and local capital cases. It was originally designed to meet this goal through a three-pronged approach—training prosecutors, defense counsel, and trial judges—in the specifics of handling a capital case. BJA currently funds training for capital prosecutors and defense attorneys individually as well as joint training in forensic issues in capital cases. For example, in Ohio, the training also will highlight best practices in presenting forensic evidence to juries affected by what prosecutors call "the CSI effect." "Shows like 'CSI' have given the general public the unrealistic belief that all crimes result in physical evidence, that all that evidence can be conclusively tested—usually within minutes—and that those tests can always be conclusively linked back to one person. None of those things are true," says Matt Kanai, General Counsel for Law Enforcement at the Ohio Attorney General's Office, a CCLI grantee. [More](#)

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