



Transcript: Justice Matters— Addressing Community Needs Through JAG Funding, an Interview With Michael Kane, Part 2

The Bureau of Justice Assistance Justice Podcast Series is designed to provide the latest information in justice innovations, practices, and perspectives from the field of criminal justice. In this edition, James H. Burch II, Acting Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, continues his conversation with Michael Kane, the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, about how community-based organizations can engage PCCD. In addition, Michael Kane talks about some of the successful programs PCCD has been able to implement with the help of Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) funding.

Jim Burch: Hello, friends and colleagues. I'm Jim Burch for the Bureau of Justice Assistance and welcome to another edition of BJA's Justice Podcast Series. In this podcast, we return to our conversation with Michael Kane, the Executive Director for the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, and we continue our discussion of how the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is administering Justice Assistance Grants, or JAG funds, through their local criminal justice advisory boards, or CJABs, to proactively enhance their justice system, using a bottoms-up or community-driven planning process.

Michael, you talked in part 1 of this discussion about how you announce funding availability and that everything you do with the JAG funds, through PCCD, is done competitively. How can community-based organizations, particularly the neighborhood-based nonprofit organizations that may have ideas or valuable resources that they would like to do or to bring into the community and to be engaged in that process, how are they able to engage with you and engage in the local planning process or the local criminal justice advisory board process? Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Michael Kane: Well, I think it really depends on what the particular program area is. For example, in the victim services field there is a lot of community-based victim service providers. They sit on our committees; we utilize a system to distribute our VOCA [Victims of Crime Act] fund that has—each county has to have a policy board to determine how to use that money. But even though the focus is on VOCA, that same process bubbles up through our victim services advisory committee that also gets a portion of the JAG fund to fund initiatives in the victim services area.

In the public safety area, I think that the CJABs are the main point of contact, [so] that if an antiviolence community-based program has an initiative that they think may be helpful, they

can come up through the CJAB, through our liaisons with the CJAB to our committees, and we can develop strategies based on what their ideas are as well. In the area of juvenile delinquency, we have a very strong partnership with local community-based programs through the Communities That Care (CTC) [<http://ctccares.org/>]. And again, working through our committee and having members of our committee that are out in these, in the counties working with the CTCs, we steer a lot of JAG money to evidence-based programs, blueprint programs, because of what we are hearing are the needs in those local areas.

And so I think that our whole process of having these organizations out in the counties and our advisory committees within PCCD and then ultimately the expertise on our committee—all have their ears out for input from a wide range of sources, including community-based organizations.

Jim Burch: That's great. And so if there's a non . . . a local, neighborhood antiviolence coalition, or maybe a faith-based organization that wants to find out about the CJAB or the advisory—county justice advisory board—how would they know about them and when they meet and how to get engaged?

Michael Kane: And we often get calls, either because they come through the Governor's office, and obviously the Governor's office gets a lot of inquiries about violence in communities and a lot of that comes through community organizations. Also the legislature gets a lot of those calls and they transfer those to us and we always take the time to talk to these organizations and one of the first things that we say to them is, is that if what they are looking for is a juvenile delinquency prevention initiative, we have them; work through the local Communities That Care program in their area. If it's something that's not focused on juvenile, but just an anticrime initiative in general, then we tell them about the CJAB, we tell them about how we fund through the CJAB, and we encourage them to go to these CJAB meetings, all of which are open to the public, and to make their views known, but also they can make their views known to individual members of that CJAB. I mean a lot of police departments hear from local community and work very closely with community-based programs. District attorneys do the same thing, and so there's a lot of avenues for local community-based programs to get their input into us and to make requests through us. The one thing that we do insist upon, though, is that we don't by-and-large have a direct link between the community-based initiative and the

commission's funding. We make sure that it goes through these other infrastructures so that we, it can be part of a strategic approach to it, to our response.

Jim Burch: That sounds like that would also promote sustainability as well, by having an agency sort of be a part of that process with them.

Michael Kane: Well, it does, and just in the way we, when we talk about sustainability, the way that we fund, we incorporate sustainability by an assumption of cost in all of our JAG grants. We start out with 75 percent funding; require 25 percent match, and then over the next year it's 50/50 and the following year it's 25/75. And that encourages local buy-in and long-term sustainability.

Jim Burch: And I think in terms—you mentioned local buy-in—I think hearing that those criminal justice advisory boards, or CJABs as you call them here in Pennsylvania, hearing that those meetings are open to the public is certainly something that I think a lot of folks can take heart in, and that transparency is very valuable.

Michael Kane: Well, it's done a couple of things, I think. Having the CJAB incentivizing the development of it and establishing minimum standards of who needs to not only be at the table, but be invited to participate at the table, and making these public, I think has accomplished a few things. It's overcome the resistance in some communities, because you're dealing with people who are independently elected, independently appointed. They don't necessarily need to work with the other components of the criminal justice system. By having this infrastructure and making it a public process, I think it's forced a lot of communities and the participants and the key policymakers in those communities to work together because they are in the spotlight and they can't simply fold their arms and walk away because there's a spotlight that's on it. And so they're forced initially to work together, but I think that the other thing—once they see what they can accomplish, and we've seen this, we've required, we've funded initiatives that are CJAB-based, and then after we've funded it and they've seen the success of that project that was developed in a collaborative process, that, I think, has a lot of ability to sustain that kind of strategic planning at the local level because now they've seen how working together they can have a victory.

Jim Burch: And I think one of the things that we've learned today, here in our visit with you and hearing about how Pennsylvania has implemented the Justice Assistance Grants Program, is that, you know we have federal requirements or statutory requirements that require states to pass through a certain portion of the JAG dollars to locals. And I heard today from you all that you have really, I think, far exceeded that minimum requirement, which is an amazing thing. I'd love to hear a little bit about how that has then resulted in successes at the local level. In other words, can you tell us about some things that have been funded by JAG that are particularly successful in your view?

Michael Kane: Sure, I mean, I think that the development of local treatment courts, a lot of that's been funded with JAG dollars. The development of the CJABs themselves has been started with JAG dollars.

The commission, as you mentioned—our variable passthrough rate is about 56 percent, but by policy for years, we've allocated it 75/25. But in addition to that 25 percent that's available for state agencies, we've worked very closely with the Governor's office and with the cooperation of the Governor's office—and obviously most of the state agencies are under the Governor's office—to develop a strategic approach to the use of that money that—so that we're not necessarily going to earmark it for a state agency, but we can use that for something that benefits, or has tangible benefits statewide. And I can give examples of that. We've—a lot of the infrastructure that has been built—the technology infrastructure that's been built—has been built with that 25 percent state portion, and our justice network, JNET, I think is a good example of that. It's been a portal for information sharing through the courts, the police, probation, all of the players in the system. And it was built with funds that did not necessarily go to a state agency to assist the department of corrections or assist the probation department, but was built for the sole purpose of helping local communities and local counties to share information through this secure mechanism. And that I think is an example of how even though we put a smaller percentage than required into state, the state portion of the JAG, nonetheless, we always try to approach it from the standpoint of how will this benefit the state and not just—and the counties, when I say the state, I mean statewide . . . the counties, how can it benefit them—not just a particular state agency. And we've had a very good working relationship with the Governor's office to allow us to do that.

Jim Burch: Great, and I think that the justice network, or JNET, initiative that you talked about is something that we've watched for many years as really a great success story that has been driven locally, been driven here by the state and by the local jurisdictions that take part in it; and as I understand it, it enables all of the counties, law enforcement, and all of the counties in Pennsylvania, local jurisdictions to be able to access information together. So you've got statewide information sharing, and I have always been so really impressed that this system was built locally, based on local needs, but it was built to national standards that were developed by the Global Justice Information Sharing Advisory Committee, so we're talking about the national information exchange model and some of the other tools that have been built on the national level through other BJA funding.

Michael Kane: Well, even though JNET was started as a state initiative for state agency information sharing, what really did drive it was local needs. And one its—it's been a great success because it allowed us to leverage a lot of other things and a lot of initiatives that depend upon for their success the ability to move information from the county level up to the state, from the state level back to the county through the state police to local police departments. It's just such a great hub that is there, and it's built, and so when a new opportunity, a technology opportunity comes along, we have this already available and we've leveraged it for SAVIN [Statewide Automated Victim Information and Notification]; we've leveraged it for a lot of other initiatives just because it was built years ago with a lot of people that had vision.

Jim Burch: That's excellent. What are some of the biggest challenges you see facing Pennsylvania, particularly your

agency, the Pennsylvania Council on Crime and Delinquency, and what's your thoughts about addressing them?

Michael Kane: You know, I think that like most SAAs across the country, the budget is a driving force of a lot of decisions and creates a lot of challenges. In Pennsylvania, we have a state prison population that has just ballooned, and even though crime rates are down, the population just goes up and up and up not only at the state level but at the local level, and when you combine that with a budget crunch, it becomes kind of a perfect storm for how do you deal with that. And so a lot of our focus and a lot of our challenge has been to incentivize investments that'll have a long-term impact in reducing those prison populations and local jail populations without impacting public safety. There's a lot of resistance to doing that because a lot of this is long term. You're not gonna—there's no magic bullet to say, other than to say, "Well, let's release 10,000 prisoners." You can't do that. So how do you incentivize something that's not going to pay a tangible benefit tomorrow, but is going to be a long-term, strategic initiative? And that, I think, is one of the big challenges we have.

And so we do that, by trying to focus funding on things that will have a long-term benefit and that's, you know, treatment courts, that's technology that helps in information sharing that makes agencies become much more efficient in the way they operate and then thereby reducing costs. And, but it remains a challenge, and I don't think that there's an easy answer to any of these but when we—I think our processes have put us in a position through the fact that we have a commission that has a lot of expertise and we have committees that build upon that expertise. I think that we're in a position to address these problems in a lot more evidence-based way and a lot better strategic way than other agencies may just because we have that statutory framework.

Jim Burch: And I think I've been impressed today in this conversation hearing about how your strategic focus is on building capacities within the system to be more efficient in how they do business. But I also think I was really—we were sort of struck by your words about the problems that persons with mental health issues present to the justice system and the ways that you are going about using evidence-based approaches, this sequential intercept model, and addressing some of that. Can you talk about that for a minute?

Michael Kane: Sure. Well, once again, this is having that relationship with the local level through the CJABs is where we find out what the needs are. Mental health issues drive a lot of the prison population, and in some instances there is no alternative because it may translate into violent crime and other instances—though there are a lot of people who end up in the system just because they come into contact with the system because of a mental health issue, and once they're in the system they tend to stay in it longer, they tend to penetrate deeper into the system. And so we've tried to address that after hearing about these issues by partnering with our Department of Public Welfare, which puts a lot of money into mental health issues, to create incentives at the local level to address some of them. And so we've been able to put small amounts of money out through funding announcements inviting innovative practices and approaches to dealing with this on a competitive basis from—through the local CJABs too—and that money has been used to develop mental health courts, to

develop the use of the sequential intercept model so that by working together at the local level between the justice system and the mental health providers and those responsible at the—in county government to deal with mental health issues, to divert people out before they enter the system, to divert them out once they're in the system at the earliest level. None of that would have been available if it hadn't been for our partnering with local criminal justice officials and having the ability through justice system's grant money to incentivize these strategies and developing these strategies at the commission level so that we can implement best practices to make sure that the money is not wasted.

Jim Burch: That's fabulous. Well, I appreciate your time, this has been a fantastic conversation and we wish you the best in the future.

Michael Kane: Thank you; enjoyed it.

Jim Burch: Thank you for taking the time to join us for this conversation. If you found the discussion interesting, we encourage you to visit the BJA web site for more innovative ideas and best practices at www.ojp.gov/BJA. From all of us here at BJA, thank you for tuning in to today's podcast. We hope you will join us again for another edition of BJA's Justice Podcast Series.

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