

**BJA FY24 Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant  
(JAG) Program-Local Solicitation  
CDFA #16.738 O-BJA-2024-172239**

**Applicant Name:** City of Wheeling, West Virginia (Ohio County, WV, Sheriff’s Office)  
**Program Title:** Enhancing Community Safety in Wheeling and Ohio County: Strengthening Law Enforcement and Public Safety Initiatives.

**ABSTRACT**

The disparate jurisdiction of the City of Wheeling Police Department and the Ohio County Sheriff’s Office in West Virginia are collaboratively applying for FY24 Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) funding to enhance their law enforcement capabilities through targeted technology and equipment upgrades. Both agencies are committed to improving public safety, reducing crime, and responding effectively to emerging threats in their shared communities.

Ohio County will allocate its portion of JAG funding to purchase two ballistic shields with integrated lights. These shields are essential for enhancing officer protection in high-risk situations, including active shooter incidents and tactical operations, ensuring law enforcement personnel are equipped to respond quickly and safely to dangerous situations.

The City of Wheeling Police Department will utilize its JAG funding to procure a forensic search and capture camera, along with portable LED lights, to strengthen its evidence collection and crime scene investigation capabilities. The specialized forensic camera will allow Wheeling Police Department to conduct detailed examinations and capture high-quality images of critical evidence, including body fluids, fingerprints, gunshot residue, and trace materials. This technology will enable officers to perform advanced on-site forensics, reducing reliance on external labs and speeding up the investigative process. The accompanying lights will enhance field investigations, particularly in challenging lighting conditions, further increasing the accuracy and efficiency of evidence collection.

These improvements will bolster the operational effectiveness of both the Wheeling Police Department and the Ohio County Sheriff’s Office. By enhancing officer safety and providing state-of-the-art tools for forensic investigations, this JAG-funded initiative will contribute to stronger law enforcement programs, improved crime resolution, and a safer community for all residents.

**NARRATIVE FOR OHIO COUNTY SHERIFF’S OFFICE FY23 PROJECT**

**A. DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE**

The Ohio County Sheriff’s Office (OCSO), along with the Wheeling Police Department (Wheeling PD) are a certified disparate jurisdiction located in the Northern Panhandle of West Virginia. Both have submitted separate narratives and budgets with a common theme of utilizing modern technology to keep underserved communities safe. The City of Wheeling, West Virginia,

is the applicant and fiscal agent for both programs. A Memorandum of Agreement has been signed outlining the responsibilities.

Wheeling PD and OCSO prioritize the welfare of the community and of their officers in pursuit of the program's goals to safeguard the community and empower law enforcement. Towards this purpose, both agencies realize the importance of equipping its officers and deputies with modern effective tools and equipment which:

- Provides them with features that enhance their safety
- Gives law enforcement greater advantages to execute their duties in hazardous conditions
- Empowers officers and deputies to protect community members
- Assists officers in apprehending criminals
- Are cost effective, with a return on investment realized in both use and enhanced security

The FY24 JAG request will help OCSO to purchase equipment, resources, and services to further the project's goal to have a gold standard of effective policing that benefits officers and community members.

OCSO remains committed to the safety of its personnel and recognizes that ensuring the well-being of deputies is essential for maintaining public trust and successfully carrying out the department's mission. OCSO not only enhances officer safety but also works to increase the department's capacity to respond effectively to high-risk situations, ultimately safeguarding both the officers and the community they serve.

Ohio County, West Virginia, is located in the Northern Panhandle of the state, with Wheeling as its county seat and largest city. As a key crossroads for commerce and travel, Ohio County is a blend of urban, suburban, and rural areas. It has a diverse population and is a hub for major highways like Interstate 70, which connects the county to neighboring states such as Pennsylvania and Ohio. This strategic location, while providing economic opportunities, also presents challenges for law enforcement, particularly when it comes to maintaining safety and security in an area that serves as a regional transportation corridor.

OCSO faces a range of challenges in its efforts to protect both the residents and its deputies. The county's proximity to larger metropolitan areas and its position along major transportation routes make it vulnerable to a variety of criminal activities, including drug trafficking, property crime, and violent incidents. In particular, the opioid crisis continues to be a significant issue for the region, with the influx of illegal narcotics such as fentanyl posing a direct threat to public health and safety. This creates an increased demand on law enforcement to address drug-related crime while also providing essential community outreach and support.

One of the major challenges for OCSO is responding to high-risk incidents, such as active shooter situations and other forms of violent crime. While these incidents may not occur daily, the unpredictability and potential for extreme danger requires the sheriff's office to remain constantly prepared. Ensuring that deputies have the necessary training and equipment, particularly protective gear like ballistic shields, is vital for their safety during these dangerous operations.

In addition to violent crime, Ohio County's mix of urban and rural environments means that the Sheriff's Office must also manage a wide range of other public safety issues, including traffic enforcement, domestic disputes, and property crimes. As Ohio County continues to grow, the demand for law enforcement services increases, placing additional strain on OCSO's resources.

Another challenge faced by the Ohio County Sheriff's Office is the aging infrastructure of its equipment. Many of the tools and resources used by deputies, including ballistic shields, have become outdated and less effective in providing adequate protection during tactical operations. The need for modern, reliable equipment is critical as deputies respond to increasingly complex and dangerous situations. Without up-to-date protective gear, deputies are exposed to higher risks, which can impede their ability to safeguard the community and themselves.

To effectively address these challenges, the Ohio County Sheriff's Office is committed to maintaining a proactive stance on public safety by continually upgrading its equipment and enhancing officer training. By investing in modern ballistic shields and other advanced law enforcement tools, OCSO will be better equipped to protect its deputies and the citizens of Ohio County, ensuring that they can respond swiftly and safely to any threat. The Sheriff's Office's dedication to public safety, coupled with its efforts to adapt to the evolving landscape of crime and law enforcement, is essential for keeping Ohio County a safe and secure place for its residents.

## **B. PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION**

OCSO utilizes a comprehensive strategic planning process to identify and prioritize its requests for the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) funding. This process is informed by a careful review of law enforcement needs, crime trends, traffic data, and community input. Meetings are held with OCSO leadership and rank-and-file officers to ensure that requests are grounded in operational realities and reflect the challenges faced by officers in the field. Additionally, the Sheriff's Office actively engages with community members through outreach initiatives, public meetings, and a robust online presence, ensuring that local concerns and recommendations are considered when formulating grant requests.

For FY24, OCSO has identified the critical need to upgrade ballistic protection for officers, particularly in response to the growing threat of active shooter situations nationwide. In recent years, there has been a significant rise in the number of active shooter incidents across the country, underscoring the necessity for law enforcement agencies to equip their personnel with advanced protective gear that goes beyond standard body armor. OCSO recognizes that providing its officers with a higher level of ballistic protection is essential for enhancing officer safety and improving response effectiveness during high-risk incidents.

Currently, OCSO maintains five ballistic shields, many of which have become outdated and are no longer fully operational. The shields, some of which are nearly 20 years old, suffer from nonfunctional headlamps and damaged carrying handles, reducing their effectiveness in tactical scenarios. Given the deteriorating condition of the existing equipment, the FY24 JAG funding will be used to purchase two new ballistic shields, replacing the most outdated and unreliable units.

The shields to be acquired will be **NIJ 0108.01 compliant, Level III Ballistic Shields** with integrated 1000-lumen lights. These shields provide enhanced ballistic protection against rifle rounds, as well as improved visibility in low-light environments, which is crucial for officers during tactical entries, active shooter responses, and high-risk warrant services. Each shield costs approximately \$5,300, and their advanced design will significantly improve officer safety and operational readiness.

In addition to routine road patrol, the OCSO Special Response Team (SRT) frequently relies on ballistic shields for tactical entries, high-risk warrant services, and other specialized operations. The acquisition of new shields will provide the SRT with modern equipment that meets current ballistic standards, ensuring that officers are adequately protected during the most dangerous assignments. The increased protection provided by these shields will allow OCSO to more effectively neutralize threats and safeguard both officers and civilians during critical incidents.

#### Implementation Timeline

Upon the award of FY24 JAG funding and the completion of the grant agreement, OCSO will act swiftly to procure the necessary equipment. The acquisition of the two-Level III Ballistic Shields with integrated 1000-lumen lights is scheduled for the first quarter of the grant period. OCSO's procurement process is streamlined to ensure timely delivery of the shields, and once the equipment is received, it will be immediately deployed for use.

To maximize the effectiveness of the new shields, OCSO will provide specialized training to all personnel who will utilize the equipment. This training will focus on the proper handling, operational use, and tactical deployment of the ballistic shields, ensuring that officers are fully prepared to incorporate the new gear into their tactical procedures.

#### Outcomes and Impact

The acquisition of the new ballistic shields will have a direct and measurable impact on the safety of OCSO officers and the overall effectiveness of the department's tactical operations. By replacing outdated equipment, the Sheriff's Office will significantly enhance its ability to respond to active shooter situations, high-risk warrant services, and other critical incidents with greater confidence and protection.

In addition to improving officer safety, the new shields will bolster the OCSO's capability to protect civilians during dangerous operations, helping to de-escalate volatile situations and reduce the risk of casualties. By investing in state-of-the-art ballistic protection, OCSO is taking proactive steps to ensure that its officers are equipped to face the evolving challenges of modern law enforcement, particularly in the context of rising threats such as active shooter events.

The long-term impact of this investment will be reflected in the Sheriff's Office's enhanced readiness, improved officer morale, and increased public trust. By equipping its personnel with modern protective gear, OCSO reaffirms its commitment to the safety of both its officers and the community it serves.

## **C. CAPABILITIES AND COMPETENCIES**

OCSO, located in Wheeling West Virginia, Ohio County, serves over 42,035 people. Together with a Sheriff and two Chief Deputies, 29 deputies patrol 109 square miles, providing protection to the communities of Bethlehem, Triadelphia, Valley Grove, West Liberty, and Clearview, all in West Virginia.

Founded in 1777, OCSO is the primary law enforcement agency responsible for maintaining public safety and order throughout the county. Ohio County includes the City of Wheeling, which is the county seat and largest city in the region. OCSO works collaboratively with local, state, and federal agencies to enforce laws, protect residents, and provide a range of services that contribute to the overall safety and security of the community.

OCSO is responsible for general law enforcement duties, including patrol services, responding to emergency calls, and conducting criminal investigations. The Sheriff's Office provides security for the Ohio County Courthouse and other judicial facilities. It is also tasked with serving legal documents, including subpoenas, eviction notices, and court orders.

The Sheriff's Office actively engages with the local community through various programs and initiatives aimed at fostering positive relationships between law enforcement and residents. These efforts often focus on crime prevention, drug abuse awareness, and education on public safety.

OCSO has specialized teams trained to respond to high-risk situations such as active shooter incidents, drug raids, and other emergencies that require tactical precision. Ohio County is part of the Ohio Valley Drug Task Force, which works to combat the distribution and abuse of illegal narcotics in the region. The K9 unit assists with searches for drugs, explosives, and missing persons, and helps with tracking suspects in critical situations.

OCSO plays a key role in maintaining public safety across a diverse landscape. It partners with the City of Wheeling Police Department and other nearby law enforcement agencies to tackle issues like drug trafficking, property crime, and violent crime, all while maintaining a focus on community-oriented policing.

The Ohio County Sheriff's Office is integral to ensuring that law enforcement services are delivered effectively and fairly, with a commitment to upholding the law and enhancing the quality of life for all county residents.

## **D. PLAN FOR COLLECTING DATA/EVALUATION**

A comprehensive data collection and evaluation process will ensure that OCSO maximizes the effectiveness of the JAG grant funding, promoting transparency, accountability, and continuous operational improvement. An expert consultant with substantial experience in managing JAG grants will oversee the collection and evaluation of all relevant data. This consultant will collaborate closely with Wheeling PD and OCSO to ensure accurate, timely, and comprehensive

data collection. This expert consultant will prepare reports and adhere to the Department of Justice's reporting requirements for the FY24 funds.