

**BJA FY23 Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant  
(JAG) Program-Local Solicitation  
CDFA #16.738 O-BJA-2023-171790**

**Applicant Name:** City of Wheeling, West Virginia (Wheeling Police Department)  
**Program Title:** The Importance of a modern police evidence room in reducing crime and keeping underserved communities safe.

**ABSTRACT**

The City of Wheeling West Virginia Police Department will use JAG funds for technology improvements and equipment and supplies to enhance its evidence room located in the newly renovated spacious police department, making it as state-of-the art as possible. This project prioritizes the welfare and safety of the community and of the officers. The Wheeling Police Department is requesting its allocated Justice Assistance Grant budget of \$57,555 for FY23.

**NARRATIVE FOR WHEELING POLICE DEPARTMENT FY23 PROJECT**

**A. DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE**

Located in historic Center Wheeling, the Wheeling West Virginia Police Department (Wheeling PD) moved into a newly renovated and spacious facility in February 2023. The 36,000 square foot facility is the most state-of-the-art police department in the region. Inside the three-story building, the department has a large training room with four large-screen televisions and audio and visual options that make presentations professional and convenient for all involved, including external parties. Internally, there are four conference rooms with high-tech audio and visual equipment that allow officers to conduct training, have meetings, and do presentations. The network has been redone with security at the forefront while providing much needed flexibility for all personnel to move about the building. Wheeling PD is staffed by 13 civilian employees and 69 sworn officers with slots for 78 officers. Active recruiting efforts are undertaken to ensure the community is protected and crime rates continue to be reduced.

The Wheeling PD’s Mission is enhancing the quality of life in and around the community by:

- Building partnerships that will provide a safe and secure community through proactive and impartial enforcement
- Honoring and enforcing codified ordinances of the City of Wheeling, the code of the State of West Virginia, and the United States Constitution
- Maintaining a focus on fighting crime and the fear of crime
- Continuing to strive to become the model law enforcement agency in the State of West Virginia

The Wheeling PD prioritizes the welfare of the community and its officers in pursuit of the project's goals to safeguard the community and empower law enforcement. Towards this purpose, the agency recognizes that up-to-date effective tools and equipment are needed and necessary to meet this project's goals. The FY23 funding requested will ensure the Wheeling PD maintains a gold standard of effective policing. Wheeling PD routinely supports the efforts of local, state, and federal law enforcement, and justice agencies as needed.

This project meets the statutory program area of law enforcement programs with a Bureau of Justice Assistance emphasis on crime and violence reduction strategies and serving underserved communities. This project also supports efforts to manage a safe up-to-date evidence room in accordance with state laws and policies; purchase gunfire detection technology; and promote data sharing and sex offender monitoring.

Wheeling PD's total calls for service were up 13% in 2022 as reported in the 2022 Annual Report. This was primarily correlated with more officer-initiated activity, more nightly foot patrols, community policing, and multiple selective enforcement operations that were conducted in 2022.



The National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) and the West Virginia Incident Based Reporting System collect information on each single incident and arrest within 22 crime categories composed of 46 offense types known as Group A offenses. Group A offenses require an extensive amount of crime data collection.

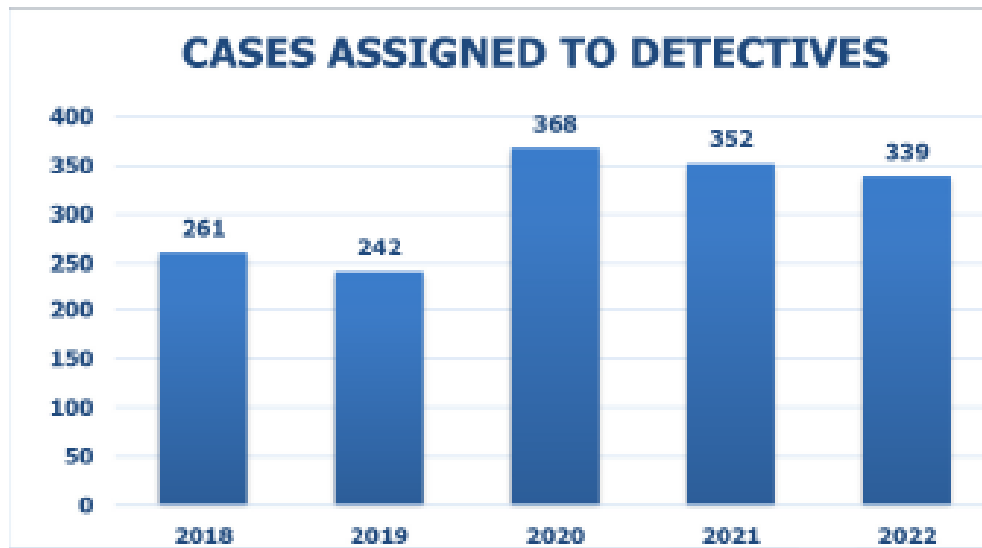
Group B offenses are also recorded but only collect arrest data for the offenses. The Wheeling PD is following the state of West Virginia in reporting all required crime data.

Group A offenses are generally more serious (homicide, robbery, sex crimes), and Group B offenses involve more nuisance, quality of life, property crimes and highway safety/traffic offenses. Despite a 6% increase in arrests, Group A offenses were up 13%.

A positive trend statistically throughout 2022 was the considerable drop in overdoses and overdose-related deaths – a category that decreased by 60%. This was due mostly to a significant amount of drug arrests and seizures of illegal narcotics by Wheeling PD and the Ohio Valley Drug Task Force. Additionally, more education, awareness, and treatment continue to play a key role.

The Investigations Division – also known as the Detective Division – consists of four investigators and a supervisor. Detectives follow up on calls that require more than an initial report and are tasked with interviewing suspects, victims and witnesses as well as obtaining surveillance video and any forensic evidence.

Wheeling PD’s Investigations Division is an affiliate of the West Virginia Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (WVICAC). The task force participates in actively pursuing perpetrators involved with internet crimes against children as well as investigating crimes reported by individuals. As listed in the 2022 Annual Report, 339 new cases were investigated in 2022.



### THE IMPORTANCE OF MODERN POLICE EVIDENCE ROOMS

The evidence room exists to safely catalog, store, and maintain the integrity of evidence found to effectively prosecute criminals or confirm another’s innocence. It is a huge responsibility that comes with greater risk to make sure proper procedures are in order so that mishaps don’t occur. In evidence rooms, mistakes can be detrimental to a case.

With the correct procedures in place, evidence can be stored and accurately used in cases so that justice can be properly served. Evidence can make or break a case at any point. It needs to be secure, strategically located, have walls that are near-impenetrable, and a reliable HVAC system in place. The expanded size of the Wheeling PD evidence room in the new police station is a modern, secure large area. Funding from the 2023 Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) will be used to purchase much needed equipment and supplies to make evidence processing and storage as state-of-the-art as possible.

Evidence room design involves the careful consideration of current best practices and future evidence storage needs. Although no one can predict the future, evidence managers can usually count on one thing: evidence will accumulate over time. Establishing flexible evidence storage areas with room to grow can help police staff maintain a secure chain of custody and ensure that justice is served. Outside forces can have a big impact on crime, and that affects the need for evidence storage.

Evidence can get destroyed in extreme temperatures. The evidence room HVAC system should be a negative-pressure system, maintaining an air temperature not above 75 degrees and relative humidity within 60% to retain the quality of evidence. Other pieces of evidence must be refrigerated as part of evidence management. For a drug storage room, there must be a ventilation system in place to prevent fumes and harmful substances from remaining inside the facility.

#### EQUIPMENT NEED, PURPOSE, DESCRIPTION

The Wheeling PD leadership and rank and file have identified many types of situations where the supplemental support accessories would be of great assistance. By having this type of equipment in-house Wheeling PD will reduce the backlog of sending evidence to the state lab; will be able to prosecute criminals quicker; and keep the community safe. All procedures conducted will follow best practices and be submitted in collaboration with ATF and NIBIN, the national database.

- Safe Develop Heat and Humidity Chamber for DFO
- Ninhydrin Processing and Downdraft Station for Latent Print Processing
- Chemicals and Trays for Latent Print Processing
- Personal Protective Equipment

This system and list of supplies will allow for latent fingerprint processing where the use of chemicals and powders will be conducted within the system. It will allow contaminated air to be pulled through a multiplex filtration system. Activated carbon filters will remove the chemical vapors while the HEPA filters remove particulate matter therefore reducing the chemical fumes released in the air for employees to breathe in and keep the space clean and safe.

- Cyanoacrylate Chamber

Designed to process evidence using a Cyanoacrylate Fuming Method, this unit provides a controlled environment for processing latent prints. A specially designed filtration system eliminates hazardous fumes. The unit incorporates a heating element and built-in humidifier to speed up the fuming process. It is the only unit with a tempered glass metal door that will never fog. The Wheeling PD needs a CA Chamber to properly, safely, and more efficiently latent print process items of evidence collected at crime scenes.

- Downdraft Powder Station

The Downdraft Powder Station keeps users safe by containing powders during the fingerprint processing. It contains a removable powder catch pan and an exhaust HEPA filter. The open-sided, open-top workstation provides unrestricted operator movement and accommodates oversized evidence.

- PMI Evidence Tracker MAX System

This system was designed by cops for cops. It is a simple, yet effective and efficient evidence and asset management system that will enable Wheeling PD to customize and take control of the agency's evidence management. It will enhance the ability to input, store, view, and manage the evidence. It will also help to return evidence back to the owners or turn it over to the West Virginia State Treasury Department. Portions of the funds from the items the Treasury Department auctions can be returned to Wheeling PD.

- Nikon D7500 Cameras
- Camera Battery EN-EL 15c
- Manfrotto Tripod Attachments
- Orange Filters
- Camera SD Cards
- ML-L3 Wireless Remote-Control Infrared

The Wheeling PD needs to upgrade cameras, tripods, and lighting equipment to help the investigations unit better document crime scenes. The current equipment could be recycled and used by the crime scene officers working on the street. Camera filters are an essential component of evidence photography. Orange, yellow, red and UV filters are designed to block or transmit different colors of light so the examiner can view hidden evidence or fluoresce and reflect specific parts of the evidence being photographed. The ML-L3 will enable a wireless remote shutter release to trigger the shutter remotely when using slower shutter speeds to prevent camera movement.

- Program subscription for PLX Software

PLX by PenLink is the only solution capable of collecting and analyzing both live and historical phone and social media data in one comprehensive platform. PLX brings clarity to complex data and helps clear cases faster. Fully customizable, it saves time, resources, and provides insights that result in faster convictions. In minutes, police departments can accomplish what would take weeks or months of weeding through mounds of paper files and multiple single-purpose applications.

- Retrieve-All Firing Barrel and Ammo for Test Fires
- Brass Catcher
- Ammunition

This brass and shell retrieval system is designed for safety. The stand-alone brass catcher captures the brass from handguns and rifles when needed for evidence. The only annual cost would be the ammunition needed to conduct test fires. With this equipment, Wheeling PD would be able to conduct its own test fires in a safe and well-lit environment. This piece of equipment could handle anything from a pistol to a 50 BMG to conduct test fires.

- Ductless Fume Extractor with Filter

Ductless fume extractors pass contaminated air through filters before returning air to the room. It can eliminate very high percentages of particles and biological hazards to protect lab workers and the lab environment.

- Dock to Dock LTL Freight

Terminal-free shipping moves the freight faster and damage-free. Shipping with Flock Freight cuts costs, skip terminals, and gets on-time, damage-free delivery.

- Hard Drives 5TB
- Hard Drives 2TB
- Thumb Drives 512 GS

This equipment will support the work of detectives handling cases involving child pornography. The hard drives and thumb drives will be used to gather evidence and store files used as evidence.

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

The Wheeling PD has a strategic planning process in place to identify JAG requests, based on need; trend data; crime statistics; and input from Wheeling PD personnel and the community. Meetings are held with Wheeling PD leadership and rank and file officers to formulate these requests. Community members' opinions and recommendations are solicited, through regularly scheduled meetings and outreach, including a website and social media presence, and consistently considered. Extensive research is always undertaken by the Wheeling PD to consider and evaluate the requested items. The Wheeling PD thoroughly researched the functionality, features, and cost-effectiveness of the equipment in this proposal and undertook cost comparison analysis.

The evidence room is the gate keeper of all the evidence that is brought into the police department. There is a chain of custody and integrity of the evidence going into the room once it leaves the officer. The civilian staff forensic scientist at Wheeling PD is responsible for submitting any evidence to the lab for processing and if any officers/ detectives need to check evidence out of the room. The forensic scientist works to return the evidence to its owner once it is no longer needed for prosecution.

All these processes will be made easier with the PMI evidence management system. The new lab processing equipment will accelerate the Wheeling PD. The processing of evidence will be safer for personnel and will also be able to be done in a more timely and controlled manner. The proposed equipment and supplies will allow Wheeling PD to do more in-house processing which can speed up the time in getting results back for prosecution versus waiting on the outside lab.

## **C. CAPABILITIES AND COMPENTENCIES**

Wheeling is a city in West Virginia. Located almost entirely in Ohio County, it lies along the Ohio River in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and contains a tiny portion extending into Marshall County. Wheeling is located about 60 miles west of Pittsburgh. It lies on the Ohio River and borders Ohio and Pennsylvania. As of the 2020 census, the city had a population of 27,062. It is the fifth-largest city in West Virginia, and the largest in the state's Northern Panhandle. The city has a total area of 14 square miles.

The poverty rate is higher than the national average at 16.5%. Even though addiction statistics are improving in the state, drug addiction remains the number one issue in West Virginia.

The Wheeling PD is believed to be the oldest in the state, organized a century before the West Virginia State Police, which was chartered in 1919. The Chief of Police is an Ohio Valley native and has held the position since 2012 and is a graduate of the FBI National Academy.

A retired officer serves as a crime analyst for the department. The civilian forensic scientist has a Bachelors and Master's in Forensic and Investigation Science from West Virginia University. She has 13 years of crime scene processing experience with the Virginia Beach Police Department and the Department of Forensic Science in Washington, DC. She assists at crime scenes when needed and processes any items of evidence that are brought in for DNA and fingerprints.

There are five detectives that are trained in forensic response/evidence collection through a company called SIRCHIE. Additionally, there are four former detectives that have also been trained in SIRCHIE. Three of those four are currently members of the Wheeling PD Evidence Response Unit. This unit responds to assist at crime scenes.

In the state of West Virginia there is no state law enforcement accreditation association. The Wheeling PD is moving toward becoming accredited through CALEA, a national association. This funding will be helpful in achieving that accreditation. The Wheeling PD is targeting to become accredited in the next three to five years.

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

An expert consultant with considerable JAG grant experience will collect outcome data and provide JAG reports, working cooperatively with Wheeling PD's Officers, Forensic Scientist and Crime Analyst. Tracked data on usage and efficacy of the equipment will be used to improve crime fighting, community welfare and safety, officer safety, and support of judicial prosecution.

