



BCPO News

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BCPO Receives \$1.2 Million in Grants from U.S. Department of Justice *Funding will be used to fight opioid epidemic, create mobile crime lab*

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina announced that the BCPO has been awarded more than \$1.2 million from two competitive federal grants that will significantly enhance the County's efforts to assist those struggling with substance use disorder, and also expand the technological capabilities of the BCPO to combat crime throughout the County.

The larger of the two grants, a \$900,000 award, was received by the United States Department of Justice (USDOJ) through the Department's Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP). The grant was pursued by the Prosecutor's Office in partnership with the County's Department of Human Services, Sheriff's Department and Department of Corrections.

As a result of the funding, as stated in the grant application, "anytime and anywhere across Burlington County, critical resources needed to refer individuals facing addiction and substance use disorder will be able to engage law enforcement officials across the criminal justice system to seek support in connecting to treatment and recovery pathways."

Specifically, the grant will be used to expand the Straight...to Treatment program, which presently allows people to walk into police departments in five towns and receive cost-free services for substance use disorder (SUD). (For more information visit www.straighttotreatment.com.)

The COSSAP grant will also supplement the Prosecutor's Office's Operation Helping Hand (OHH) grant program, ensuring it will remain in place without interruption for the next three years. OHH is an initiative through which police officers throughout the County can refer anyone they encounter following an overdose, an arrest for a nonviolent offense driven by substance use disorder, or simply whom they know to be struggling with SUD, to a recovery coach on call 24/7, who can offer support and treatment options to that individual. Over the past two years, 292 people have accepted coaching from a recovery specialist and 153 people have been referred to treatment through the OHH program.

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The COSSAP funding also will enable OHH to be expanded to the Burlington County Jail, where a connection to a recovery coach will be offered to inmates detained in the facility, to provide support while incarcerated and after their release, a time at which they are particularly vulnerable to an overdose. Additionally, Burlington County's Department of Human Services will utilize grant funds to offer programs and support to children who are affected by the substance abuse of their parents or guardian. The grant will further support additional deployments of the Sheriff's Department's Hope One vehicle, which brings out into the community services that include referrals to treatment, housing, vaccines, rapid testing, peer recovery, personal identification cards, and a range of social service programs.

Of the COSSAP grant, Prosecutor Coffina said, "We are excited to have these additional resources to help us in our fight against the relentless substance use disorder epidemic that continues to take an unbearable toll on our communities. Burlington County's COSSAP program will truly be a team effort and we look forward to working with our County partners to bring these targeted services to those in need."

The second grant, for \$340,000, was also awarded by the USDOJ, through its Smart Prosecution – Innovative Prosecution Solutions initiative.

The centerpiece of the Smart Prosecution grant will be the acquisition of a mobile high-tech crime lab, which will enable the BCPO to process digital evidence more quickly at the scene in cases where every minute is critical, such as homicides, drug-induced deaths and missing children.

A mobile lab will also be beneficial at less-emergent scenes that involve the rapid collection of digital evidence, such as during the execution of a search warrant in Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM) cases. This will be particularly helpful in Burlington County – the largest county in the state – where the round-trip drive to our Forensic Services Center to process digital evidence can take 90 minutes from some municipalities.

In addition to the mobile high-tech crime lab, the Smart Prosecution grant will be utilized to fund a new Intelligence Analyst position to support the BCPO's Major Crimes Unit, which handles homicides and other cases of gun violence, and to purchase additional equipment for the BCPO's High Tech Crime Lab for use by our detectives and other law enforcement agencies operating in our County.

"Digital evidence is omnipresent and has become central to nearly every investigation we undertake," Prosecutor Coffina said. "Having these additional resources will significantly enhance our capabilities to evaluate and act upon such evidence expeditiously to solve the most serious and impactful crimes experienced by our residents."

The COSSAP grant program extends for three years, while the Smart Prosecution grant is a two-year initiative.

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