

**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 (Wheeling Police Department)
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 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 PD 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 WHEELING POLICE DEPARTMENT

A. DESCRIPTION OF ISSUE

The Wheeling, West Virginia, Police Department (Wheeling PD), located in the historic Center Wheeling district, moved into a newly renovated 36,000-square-foot facility in 2023. This state-of-the-art building has significantly enhanced the department’s operational capacity, providing modern infrastructure to support policing and public safety efforts. However, despite these

advancements, challenges remain in equipping the department with the critical tools and resources required to address the evolving and increasingly complex nature of crime in the region.

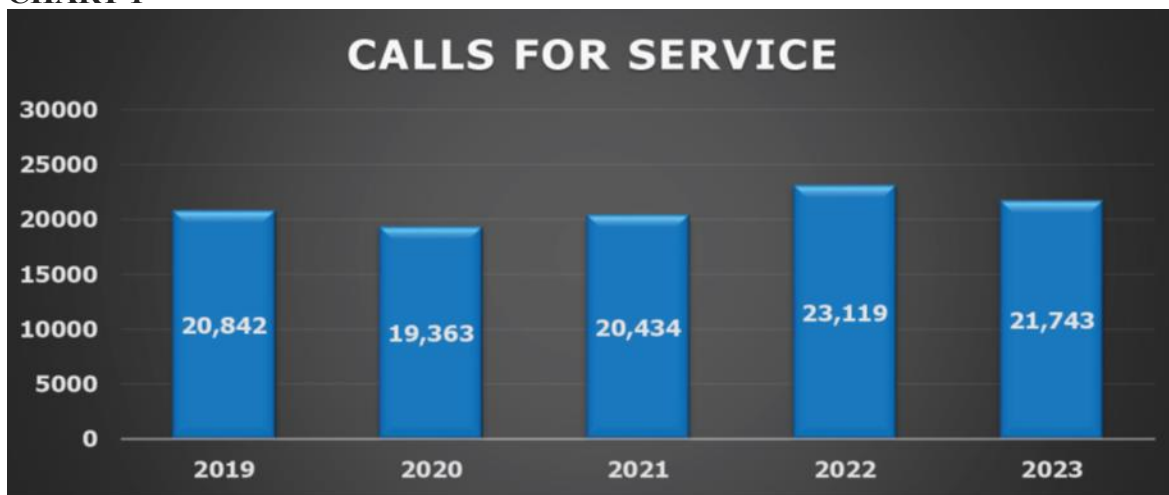
Within the facility, Wheeling PD has access to advanced training rooms and conference spaces, all outfitted with high-tech audio-visual systems that promote professional presentations, training sessions, and inter-agency collaborations. The upgraded network infrastructure ensures secure and flexible communication across departments. These features allow the department to operate efficiently; however, the increasing demands of crime-fighting and public safety require further investment in equipment and technology.

Wheeling PD is currently staffed by 22 civilian employees and 69 sworn officers, with additional positions available to increase the force to 78 officers. Active recruiting efforts are critical to ensure that the department is fully staffed and equipped to meet the community's needs and maintain its proactive approach to crime reduction. The department's mission is centered on building partnerships to create a safe and secure community through impartial enforcement, while also striving to serve as a model law enforcement agency in West Virginia.

Ongoing Challenges

Despite the department's best efforts, Wheeling continues to face challenges from rising crime rates, particularly in serious offenses like homicides, robberies, and sex crimes. Although the total calls for service dropped by 6% in 2023, as shown in Chart 1, due to increased officer-initiated activity, community policing efforts, and selective enforcement operations, the severity of certain crimes remains a concern. The Wheeling PD is committed to reducing crime and fear of crime through both prevention and enforcement, but additional resources are required to expand its capacity and meet the evolving demands of the community.

CHART 1



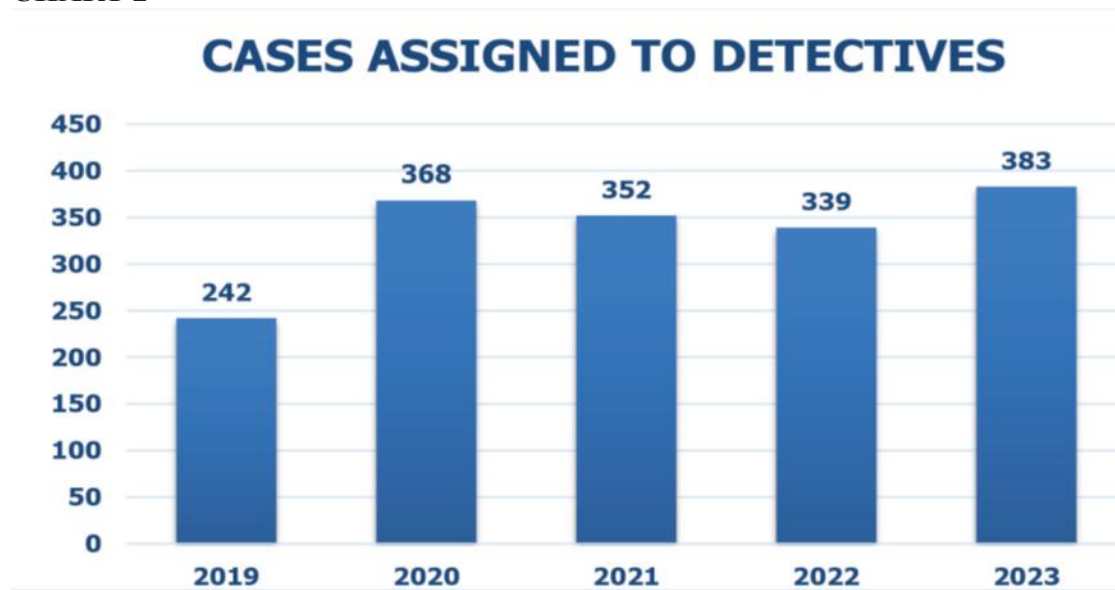
Of particular concern is the resurgence of drug-related issues. After years of declining overdose numbers, Wheeling saw an 11% increase in overdoses in 2023, with 182 overdose incidents and 26 related deaths. The increased use of fentanyl, often mixed with other opioids and new drugs like xylazine, has exacerbated the public health and safety crisis. Wheeling PD, in collaboration

with the Ohio Valley Drug Task Force, is working diligently to combat the spread of illegal narcotics. However, these efforts require continuous improvements in evidence handling, crime detection, and inter-agency collaboration.

Critical Resource Gaps

Wheeling PD has identified several critical gaps in its current resources, particularly in evidence processing and investigative technologies. The department’s Investigations Division, which consists of four detectives and a supervisor, handles complex cases, including internet crimes against children and drug-related offenses. Wheeling PD Detectives experienced an increase in cases in 2023, as shown in Chart 2. These cases require significant resources, including up-to-date forensic tools and technology for evidence processing and crime scene management. Detectives are averaging 85 cases per year, with more than half requiring some form of crime scene or evidence processing.

CHART 2



Wheeling PD’s modern evidence room is a critical asset, but further investment in technology and equipment is needed to streamline evidence collection and management. FY24 JAG funding will enable Wheeling PD to procure advanced tools for both field and in-house evidence processing, reducing the backlog of evidence that must be sent to state labs and enhancing the department’s ability to prosecute cases more swiftly.

Crime Trends and Reporting

Wheeling PD participates in the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) and the West Virginia Incident Based Reporting System, which collect detailed crime data on 22 categories of Group A offenses, such as homicide, robbery, and sex crimes, as well as Group B offenses, which cover quality-of-life crimes and traffic offenses. The growing complexity and volume of crime data requires advanced reporting and analysis tools, further emphasizing the need for technological upgrades within the department.

The Importance of JAG Funding

The FY24 Edward Byrne JAG funding is essential for Wheeling PD to address its resource gaps and continue its mission to serve and protect the community. By investing in modern equipment, forensic tools, and technological infrastructure, the department can enhance its capacity to respond effectively to crime, manage evidence with greater precision, and support regional efforts to reduce violence and drug-related incidents.

With the support of JAG funding, Wheeling PD will maintain its proactive approach to policing while adapting to the growing demands placed on its officers and investigative units. This investment will ensure the department remains equipped to meet future challenges and safeguard the community through innovation, collaboration, and effective law enforcement strategies.

B. PROJECT DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Wheeling PD has a strategic planning process to develop and prioritize its requests for the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant funding. This process is driven by an in-depth analysis of departmental needs, crime trends, and community input. Key decision-making factors include comprehensive crime data analysis, consultation with law enforcement personnel, and regular engagement with community stakeholders. This inclusive approach ensures that the proposed solutions not only address the department's operational requirements but also reflect the broader concerns of the community it serves.

Wheeling PD leadership works closely with rank-and-file officers to identify the most pressing needs. These discussions are informed by the department's ongoing evaluation of crime statistics and an assessment of the latest trends in crime and forensic technologies. The department actively solicits input from the community through scheduled public meetings, outreach initiatives, and digital platforms such as its website and social media channels. This inclusive feedback loop ensures that the equipment and technology requests are aligned with community safety priorities and operational requirements.

Before finalizing this grant proposal, Wheeling PD conducted extensive research on potential solutions to ensure cost-effectiveness and functionality. The department evaluated various products, comparing their features and capabilities, to select the most suitable equipment for advancing its forensic investigation capacity. This thorough vetting process, coupled with a cost comparison analysis, led to the selection of the **Foster and Freeman Crime-Lite Auto Camera** as the centerpiece of the FY24 JAG request.

Equipment Details

The Foster and Freeman Crime-Lite Auto Camera represents a critical enhancement to the department's forensic capabilities. As a full-spectrum camera equipped with 55 different illumination wavebands, it is designed to streamline and optimize evidence detection and analysis both at crime scenes and in the laboratory. This cutting-edge device incorporates the latest forensic imaging technology, combining an alternate light source with a compact, handheld camera. It offers real-time visible, fluorescent, and infrared examination capabilities, which are crucial for detecting evidence such as body fluids, blood on dark fabrics, fingerprints, gunshot residue, and trace materials like glass, fibers, and hairs.

Optimized for mobile use, the Crime-Lite Auto Camera enhances the workflow of evidence collection and processing. Its user-friendly interface, APP-style controls, and multi-touch display allow Wheeling PD personnel to conduct efficient on-site examinations and capture critical evidence. The device's advanced connectivity features enable immediate digital transfer of images and video files to forensic laboratories, expediting the overall investigative process. By capturing and storing forensic data directly within the camera, Wheeling PD will reduce the need to send evidence to state laboratories, decreasing processing times and backlog, allowing for more timely prosecutions, and increased public safety.

In addition to the camera, Wheeling PD will purchase two **DEWALT 20-volt 3000-Lumen LED battery-operated stand work lights** to complement the Crime-Lite Auto Camera during field investigations. These portable, high-powered lights will ensure that officers have sufficient light in dark conditions, further enhancing the efficiency of evidence collection. Together, these tools will allow Wheeling PD to conduct more comprehensive and accurate investigations on-site, strengthening the department's overall crime-solving capabilities.

Implementation Timeline

Upon the award of FY24 JAG funding and the signing of the grant agreement, Wheeling PD will move swiftly to procure the equipment. The department plans to complete the purchase of the Crime-Lite Auto Camera and the DEWALT work lights in the first quarter of the grant period. The equipment will be deployed immediately following acquisition, with officers receiving specialized training on its use to ensure that it is integrated seamlessly into their investigative procedures.

Outcomes and Impact

The acquisition of the Crime-Lite Auto Camera and accompanying work lights will significantly enhance Wheeling PD's forensic capabilities. The camera's ability to detect and analyze a wide range of evidence types—both at crime scenes and in controlled laboratory environments—will reduce the department's reliance on external state labs, speeding up the processing of critical evidence. As a result, Wheeling PD anticipates faster case resolutions, improved clearance rates, and more effective prosecution of offenders.

By equipping the department with the latest forensic technology, Wheeling PD will enhance its ability to contribute to regional and national efforts, including collaboration with the ATF and participation in the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN). This will not only strengthen local investigations but also support broader crime prevention and reduction initiatives at both state and federal levels.

The FY24 JAG grant funding will enable Wheeling PD to purchase essential forensic tools that are integral to its evidence processing and investigative functions. These tools will enhance the department's operational efficiency, reduce evidence backlogs, and enable officers to solve crimes more swiftly, all while keeping the community safe. By maintaining best practices in evidence collection and processing, Wheeling PD will continue to uphold its mission to provide a secure, crime-free environment for the City of Wheeling.

C. CAPABILITIES AND COMPETENCIES

Wheeling PD serves the City of Wheeling, located primarily in Ohio County, West Virginia, along the Ohio River near the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Wheeling, the largest city in West Virginia's Northern Panhandle, had a population of 27,062 as of the 2020 census and covers a total area of 14 square miles. The city's poverty rate of 16.5% exceeds the national average, and although statewide addiction rates have shown improvement, drug addiction remains a significant issue in West Virginia.

Wheeling PD is one of the oldest law enforcement agencies in the state, having been established well before the West Virginia State Police, which was formed in 1919. The department has been under the leadership of its current Chief of Police, an Ohio Valley native and FBI National Academy graduate, since 2012.

The department benefits from a highly skilled team, including a retired officer who serves as a crime analyst and a civilian forensic scientist with both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Forensic and Investigative Science from West Virginia University. With 14 years of experience in crime scene processing, gained from roles at the Virginia Beach Police Department and the Department of Forensic Science in Washington, D.C., the forensic scientist plays a crucial role in both crime scene investigations and evidence processing for DNA and fingerprint analysis.

Wheeling PD's investigative capabilities are bolstered by five detectives trained in forensic response and evidence collection through SIRCHIE, a well-regarded training provider. Additionally, three members of the Wheeling Police Department's Evidence Response Unit, all former detectives with similar SIRCHIE training, assist with crime scene response when needed.

The department maintains a robust commitment to ongoing professional development through its Training Division, ensuring that all officers meet or exceed state-mandated training requirements. Each officer is required to complete a minimum of 16 hours of in-service or continuing education annually, with supervisors and instructors facing additional training mandates based on their roles. In 2023, Wheeling PD officers completed a total of 2,963 training hours, including over 300 hours focused on mental health and wellness, 542 hours on de-escalation and firearms training, and nearly 800 hours dedicated to supervisory development.

Although West Virginia lacks a state law enforcement accreditation body, Wheeling PD is working toward accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), a national organization. Wheeling PD intends to become accredited within the next five years, further enhancing its commitment to professional standards and community safety.

D. PLAN FOR COLLECTING DATA/EVALUATION

A comprehensive data collection and evaluation process will ensure that Wheeling PD, as the lead applicant, maximizes the effectiveness of the JAG grant funding, promoting transparency, accountability, and continuous operational improvement.

Lead Evaluation and Data Collection Personnel

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's Officers, Forensic Scientist, and Crime Analyst 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.

Outcome Metrics and Data Tracking

To assess the success of the program, Wheeling PD will track the following key outcome metrics related to the grant's objectives:

- **Use of Equipment:** Detailed logs will be maintained on the frequency, type, and context in which the equipment purchased through the JAG grant is deployed in field operations.
- **Officer and Community Safety:** Data on officer safety incidents and improvements will be gathered, including reports of injuries, close calls, or other safety concerns that were mitigated due to the grant-funded equipment.
- **Crime Reduction and Efficacy:** Crime statistics, particularly those related to cases where grant-funded resources are used, will be collected and analyzed for patterns, including arrest rates, case closure rates, and evidence processing times.
- **Support for Judicial Prosecution:** The effectiveness of equipment in providing crucial evidence that leads to successful judicial prosecution will be documented, illustrating how evidence derived from grant-funded tools impacted prosecutorial outcomes.

CompStat-Based Monitoring

Wheeling PD will use its existing CompStat process to monitor crime trends and the effectiveness of all equipment. This process, which emphasizes data-driven policing, will allow the department to identify emerging crime patterns and hotspots, ensuring resources and equipment are deployed strategically.

Data Sources

Data for the evaluation will be collected from multiple internal sources:

- **Incident and Crime Reports:** Generated by responding officers using the equipment.
- **Forensic Lab Results:** Evaluations of DNA, fingerprints, and other forensic evidence processed using new tools.
- **Officer Activity Logs:** Documenting the use of the equipment in various police operations, arrests, and investigations.
- **Court Records:** Highlighting the role of forensic evidence in trials, plea bargains, and case resolutions.

Community and Stakeholder Feedback

In line with its commitment to making Wheeling a safer place to live, work, and play, the Wheeling PD will also solicit feedback from community partners and local stakeholders, including the judicial system, on the impact of the JAG-funded equipment.