



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

November 26, 2024

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #25-26 Montgomery County Government, Department of Police, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Grant Programs, FFY24 Byrne Discretionary Grants Program, Crisis Co-Response Team Award (\$700,000) and #25-27 Montgomery County Government, Department of Police, FFY 24 BJA, Invited to Apply-Discretionary Grants Program, Crime Laboratory Information Management System Award (\$963,000)

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriations #25-26-Crisis Co-Response Team Award and #25-27-Crime Laboratory Information Management System Award, both Federal Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)-FFY24 Byrne Discretionary Grants Program awards, have the potential to reduce racial disparities and inequities. The awards will allow the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) to enhance the Crisis Intervention Team and implement a Laboratory Information Management System. This funding has the potential to improve community safety and mental health as well as enhance the efficiency and timeliness of crime lab forensics-which impacts low-income as well as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Despite potential improvements, the crisis intervention initiative should center the ongoing challenge of disproportionate law enforcement impacts on BIPOC communities, particularly Black residents, and align with guidance emphasizing the need to develop mental health crisis systems that reduce reliance on criminal justice interventions. Additionally, expanding the collection of demographic data on residents receiving crisis intervention or improvements in resolving cases due to improvements in forensic evidence would provide further clarity on the positive impacts of the initiatives.

II. **BACKGROUND:** The BJA FFY24 Byrne Discretionary Grants Program awards funding for the County through an Invited to Apply program for Crisis Co-Response Team and Crime Laboratory Information Management System awards. The purpose of the Byrne Discretionary Grants Program is to improve the functioning of the criminal justice system, to prevent or combat juvenile delinquency, and to assist victims of crime (other than compensation). The County was invited to apply for this discretionary funding.

The first grant would enable MCPD to expand its Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), which currently includes a police sergeant, a supervisory therapist, and five sworn CIT officers. The CIT program pairs specially trained law enforcement officers with licensed mental health professionals to address mental health crises. Officers are trained in de-escalation techniques, while mental health professionals bring their experience in understanding psychological issues and crisis intervention strategies. This collaborative approach aims to prioritize safety and effective crisis resolution. The CIT program plans to move to a co-responder model, with each CIT officer having a therapist in the vehicle with them to respond to these calls-for-service.

The second award would provide funding to implement a Crime Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) within the MCPD Crime Laboratory.¹ This system will automate various processes and provide real-time access to stakeholders, including investigative units, partnering agencies, and legal professionals, thereby enhancing transparency. The funding will enable MCPD to streamline data management and analysis, resulting in quicker turnaround times for forensic results. Key activities associated with the implementation of LIMS include:

- **System Integration:** Establishing interoperability within existing databases and integrating new software products to optimize laboratory operations.
- **Data Management:** Documenting case-related information uniformly and concisely, managing resources effectively, and ensuring data integrity and security.
- **Reporting and Analysis:** Generating internal and external reports for data aggregation, comparison, benchmarking, and trend analysis, enabling data-informed decision-making.

III. **ANALYSIS:** As noted earlier, MCPD received two Byrne Discretionary Grants Program awards: the Crisis Co-Response Team Award and the Crime Laboratory Information Management System Award. Both programs will address needs in the County by improving community safety and mental health and enhancing the efficiency and timeliness of the crime lab forensics.

¹ Crime Laboratory Information Management System, Award Information. Available at: <https://bjia.ojp.gov/funding/awards/15pbja-24-gg-00186-brnd>.

Crisis Intervention Team

MCPD provided the following information in support of this program's ability to reduce racial disparities and inequities in the County.

Mental health crisis situations are not siloed into one race or another. These events affect all members of society. The response pattern and services provided have, and will, reflect a broad spectrum approach without regard to race. The supplemental appropriation will reduce racial inequities in the County, because it will increase the resources available to the CIT, allowing them to reach more people and provide a better service to those experiencing a mental health crisis.

At the time of application, the County reported an increase in mental health-related calls from 3,089 calls in 2019 to 8,458 in 2022, which represented a 173.8% increase.² The rise in mental health-related calls needing intervention supports the expansion of the CIT program. Since the implementation of the 911-based CIT response model, the County has observed a decrease in repeat calls for service at specific locations, with residents in these areas being connected with the County's Health and Human Services (HHS) Department for comprehensive support services. Further benefits of the CIT program to the community could include reduced crime rates, fewer unnecessary arrests, and an overall safer environment. Additionally, integrating CITs into the community could build stronger relationships between law enforcement and mental health services. Where possible, expanded collection, disaggregation, and reporting of demographics by race, ethnicity, and other relevant characteristics would allow the County to gain further insights into the use of services and any inequities that may exist for persons receiving crisis intervention.

The Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) analyzed the impact of mental health crisis response in a Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement (RESJIS) for Bill 43-23 Crisis Intervention Team – Established.³ The RESJIS found that “Black community members would be disproportionately impacted by the establishment of a co-responder team model for mental health crisis response in the County.” It additionally noted that research evidence on the effectiveness of co-responder models is mixed, and it remains unclear how the new Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) program would reduce reliance on law enforcement in mental health crises, which is essential for advancing RESJ. The RESJIS also referenced federal best practices, which recommend that communities “develop behavioral health crisis care systems that reside outside of the criminal justice system and avoid overreliance on law enforcement to respond to mental health situations.”⁴

² Crisis Co-Response Teams, Award Information. Available at: <https://bjia.ojp.gov/funding/awards/15pbja-24-gg-00185-brnd>.

³ RESJIS-Bill 43-23 Crisis Intervention Team – Established. Available at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/resjis/2023/Bill43-23.pdf>

⁴ OLO Report 2021-4, Public Safety Responses to Mental Health Situations. Available at: https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/2021_Reports/OLOReport2021-4.pdf

Crime Laboratory Information Management System

MCPD provided the following information in support of this program's ability to reduce racial disparities and inequities in the County.

The benefits of implementing a Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) to assist in solving crime will have a profound impact on low-income communities that are disproportionately affected by this issue. By streamlining data management and analysis, the LIMS will enable quicker turnaround times for forensic results, allowing law enforcement officers to direct their investigations more effectively.

Providing timely results can significantly reduce the likelihood of revictimization, as faster responses to incidents will help in addressing crime more proactively. A more efficient LIMS will support our efforts to create a safer environment for families to thrive.

By enhancing the overall effectiveness of our investigations, we can work towards building a stronger, more resilient community where individuals feel secure and supported. The LIMS will play a crucial role in our commitment to improving safety and fostering social justice, ultimately benefiting all residents, especially those in underserved areas.

cc: Marc Yamada, Chief, Montgomery County Police Department
Tricia Swanson, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive