



**U.S. Department of Justice**

Office of Legislative Affairs

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Office of the Assistant Attorney General

*Washington, D.C. 20530*

July 8, 2015

The Honorable Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senate  
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator Casey:

This responds to your letter to the Attorney General dated April 27, 2015, regarding Department of Justice (Department) resources to assist the City of Wilkes-Barre in combating gun violence. We apologize for our delay in responding to your letter.

Unfortunately, the firearm violence experienced by Wilkes-Barre is not unique; gun violence is a national problem affecting large urban areas, smaller cities, and rural America. Combating violent crime, and gun violence in particular, is a top priority for the Department, and we carefully evaluate the allocation of our law enforcement and grant resources to ensure maximum impact on violent crime at a national level. Having evaluated the concerns you express in your letter, the Department is pleased to advise you that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearm and Explosives (ATF) will provide direct, immediate assistance to the Wilkes-Barre Police Department in the formulation and execution of intelligence-driven enhancements to existing efforts to curb the gun violence plaguing the city. In addition, to strengthen Wilkes-Barre's long-term efforts to combat violent crime, the Department's Office of Justice Programs (OJP), through its Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), stands ready to assist the city in navigating the grant-funding process and in accessing training and technical assistance (TTA) programs.

ATF Assistance

Immediate Department assistance to the city will be provided by ATF, through its Philadelphia Field Division Crime Gun Intelligence Center (CGIC). The CGIC will work closely with the Wilkes-Barre Police Department to generate a comprehensive threat assessment regarding firearms violence in the city and region. The assessment will provide the police department, ATF, and other law enforcement partners with enhanced intelligence regarding both the perpetrators of gun violence in Wilkes-Barre and the sources of the crime-guns that fuel violence in the city. This intelligence will allow law enforcement to focus resources on the most violent offenders and organizations, while also disrupting the flow of crime guns into the city. ATF will utilize two of its unique national programs, firearms tracing through National Tracing

Center Division (NTC) and the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN), both as part of the assessment process and in the implementation of enhanced enforcement strategies.

The assessment will start with a detailed study of recovered crime gun trace data to help identify the sources of illegal firearms flowing into Wilkes-Barre. Firearms tracing involves the systematic tracking of a firearm through the chain of distribution. Firearms tracing, which is exclusively conducted by ATF's NTC, helps law enforcement link a suspect in a criminal investigation to the firearm used in the crime, helps identify illegal firearms traffickers, and provides the data necessary to identify illegal firearm trafficking patterns and trends.

The assessment will also include an evaluation of NIBIN utilization by the Wilkes-Barre Police Department, and the development of strategies to better utilize NIBIN as an investigative tool in violent crime investigations. NIBIN is a system of computer hardware and software coupled with a database that is employed to acquire, transmit, store, compare, and retrieve digitized images of firearms evidence (shell casings and projectiles). NIBIN is the exclusive interstate, automated ballistic imaging network in the United States. Available through more than 150 sites around the country, including the Wilkes-Barre area, NIBIN allows participating partners to conduct local, regional and national searches of recovered firearms evidence to quickly establish links between violent crimes—including links that would have never been identified without this technology. A NIBIN hit report provides law enforcement with immediate tactical leads and longer term strategic intelligence to assess gun crime patterns. Tactical leads include matching "hits" to link separate incidents to the same crime gun, often allowing investigators to quickly identify suspects and undertake immediate enforcement action – preventing additional firearm violence by "trigger-pullers."

Lastly, in close cooperation with the intelligence components of the Wilkes-Barre PD and other local and state law enforcement agencies, the CGIC will evaluate regional violent crime data, particularly that related to violent street gang activity. Combined with trace data and NIBIN generated leads, this evaluation will assist in identifying specific violent criminals and organizations responsible for multiple, repeated offenses. Overall, the assessment will provide law enforcement with an intelligence blueprint that will assist them in determining resource allocation, including whether a particular offender or organization should be the subject of state or federal investigation and prosecution.

#### OJP Assistance

The Department's Office of Justice Programs (OJP) administers several programs to combat violent crime, including training and technical assistance (TTA) and grant partnerships with cities and communities. OJP works to identify the most pressing crime-related challenges and implement evidence-based, data-driven solutions to address them. OJP's Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) offers many grant programs that may be of specific interest to the Wilkes-Barre Police Department.

BJA's Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program is the leading source of federal justice funding to state and local jurisdictions. It provides states, tribes, and local governments with critical funding necessary to support a range of program areas, including law enforcement; prosecution, indigent defense, and the courts; prevention and education; corrections and community corrections; drug treatment and enforcement; planning, evaluation, and technology improvement; and crime victim and witness initiatives. Local and state JAG funding opportunities are available.

Regarding local JAG funding, Wilkes-Barre has one active grant: a Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 JAG award (2014-DJ-BX-1008) totaling \$30,275, with \$19,501 allocated to Wilkes-Barre through a Memorandum of Understanding with Hazleton City and Luzerne County. Wilkes-Barre plans to use the FY 2014 JAG funds to support police overtime patrols in high-crime areas and provide officer training in dealing with violent crime areas. Our records indicate that the full award amount of \$30,275 remains available, and the grant project's end date is September 30, 2017.

We also encourage Wilkes-Barre to look into state JAG funds opportunities for FY 2014 and upcoming FY 2015 opportunities which states should be receiving within the next few weeks. Pennsylvania received \$7,378,500 in FY 2014 state JAG funds, and the state is required to pass through 59.2 percent of these funds to local jurisdictions. The city should direct its inquiries to the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD), which is Pennsylvania's State Administering Agency (SAA) for BJA state JAG funds. The SAA point of contact is Robert Merwine, Director of PCCD's Office of Criminal Justice System Improvements. Mr. Merwine can be reached by phone at 717-265-8549 or e-mail at [rmerwine@pa.gov](mailto:rmerwine@pa.gov).

BJA has a number of other grant programs that may interest the Wilkes-Barre Police Department. These include the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation (BCJI) Initiative, Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN), and the Smart Policing Initiative (SPI):

- BCJI ([www.bja.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?Program\\_ID=70](http://www.bja.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?Program_ID=70)) is a part of the White House's Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative. The BCJI Initiative supports data- and research-driven projects to build and enhance the capacity of communities to create comprehensive strategies to address priority crime problems. BCJI employs strategies that build the capacity of distressed communities to better prevent and reduce crime and enhance conditions that contribute to community crime, as well as to expand efforts of communities to more comprehensively address these crime issues.
- PSN ([www.bja.gov/programdetails.aspx?program\\_id=74](http://www.bja.gov/programdetails.aspx?program_id=74)) is focused on reducing violent gun and gang crime. This funding can be used to hire new federal and state prosecutors, support investigators, provide training, distribute gun lock safety kits, deter juvenile gun crime, develop and promote community outreach efforts, and support other strategies to reduce gun and gang violence.

- SPI ([www.bja.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?Program\\_ID=80](http://www.bja.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?Program_ID=80)) supports law enforcement agencies in building evidence-based, data-driven tactics and strategies that improve policing performance and effectiveness, while containing costs. It seeks to improve offender-based and place-based "hotspot policing by replicating proven evidence-based practices or encouraging exploration of new, unique solutions to public safety problems that leverage innovative applications of analysis, technology, and evidence-based practices.

BJA also advises Wilkes-Barre to review the OJP FY 15 Program Plan (<http://data.ojp.gov/services/PPI/includes/ppi/Home.htm>) to determine if there are any other funding opportunities available in FY 2015 that may interest the city.

These and other OJP grant solicitations are typically issued between March and July of any given year. Unfortunately, the funding solicitations for many relevant FY 2015 programs (including BCJI, PSN, and SPI) have closed. We encourage Wilkes-Barre and other communities in your jurisdiction to keep up to date on OJP grant solicitation announcement via [grants.gov](http://grants.gov) and individual Department agency web sites (e.g., [www.bja.gov/funding](http://www.bja.gov/funding)). For instance, Wilkes-Barre might want to sign up for e-mail alerts of solicitation announcements at [https://service.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDOJOJP/subscriber/new?topic\\_id=USDOJOJP\\_8](https://service.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDOJOJP/subscriber/new?topic_id=USDOJOJP_8). [Grants.gov](http://grants.gov) also provides e-mail alerts that can be customized based on agency, key words, funding instrument type, Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance numbers, etc. To subscribe for e-mail notifications through [Grants.gov](http://grants.gov), visit [www.grants.gov/web/grants/manage-subscriptions.html](http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/manage-subscriptions.html).

In addition to grant funding, OJP offers a wealth of TTA opportunities for the nation's law enforcement agencies. BJA's National Training and Technical Assistance Center (NTTAC) provides no-cost training to local, tribal, and state law enforcement agencies to support efforts to reduce crime, recidivism, and unnecessary confinement. For example, BJA's Crime Analysis on Demand Training works with law enforcement agencies to enhance data-driven decision making capabilities and crime prevention resources. These engagements address challenges in analytical skills, data quality, and other critical areas. BJA's NTTAC TTA providers meet with stakeholders to perform assessments, make recommendations, and support the implementation of programs to enhance public safety. Wilkes-Barre Police Department can learn more about this and other available TTA at [www.bjatrain.org](http://www.bjatrain.org).

Along with NTTAC, OJP also offers TTA opportunities for communities to address public safety issues through the Diagnostic Center. The Diagnostic Center connects local communities with a variety of resources at the state, local and federal level. OJP's Diagnostic Center collaborates with stakeholders within the community and partners across the Department, and throughout the criminal justice community, to apply proven evidenced-based programs, practices, and solutions to public safety challenges. Wilkes-Barre Police Department can learn more about the Diagnostic Center at [www.ojpdagnosticcenter.org](http://www.ojpdagnosticcenter.org).

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One final initiative we bring to your attention is the Violence Reduction Network (VRN), which former Attorney General Eric Holder launched in September 2014. The VRN is a holistic approach to violence reduction that complements the Department's Smart on Crime Initiative by leveraging the vast array of existing resources across Department components to reduce violence in some of the country's cities with violent crime rates above the national average. The VRN creates a forum for cities to engage in developing violence reduction strategies directly with Department programmatic and law enforcement components, national and international practitioners, and researchers who have proven track records in developing, implementing, and evaluating strategies and tactics that reduce urban violence. The Wilkes-Barre Police Department might find useful resources on the VRN web site: [www.vrnetwork.org](http://www.vrnetwork.org).

We hope this information is helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact this office if we may provide additional assistance regarding this or any other matter.

Sincerely,



Peter J. Kadzik  
Assistant Attorney General