



**south carolina**  
**DEPARTMENT *of* PUBLIC SAFETY**

**PROTECT. EDUCATE. SERVE.**

**OFFICE *of* HIGHWAY SAFETY AND JUSTICE PROGRAMS**

**Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant  
(JAG) Program  
State Strategic Plan  
Federal Fiscal Years 2024-2028**

**State of South Carolina**

**South Carolina Department of Public Safety, Office of Highway Safety and Justice Programs**

Post Office Box 1993  
Blythewood, South Carolina 29016

Phone: (803) 896-8707 FAX: (803) 896-8714

Phil Riley, Director

Joi Brunson, Grants Administration Manager

Vacant, Justice Grant Programs Manager

Kayla Boston, Administrative Assistant

Amy Kingston, Criminal Justice Programs Supervisor

Amy Free, Criminal Justice Programs Coordinator

Melissa Vail, Criminal Justice Programs Coordinator

Ansley Brock, Criminal Justice Programs Assistant

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program is the leading source of funding to state and local jurisdictions to support a range of programs focusing on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the justice system. The South Carolina Department of Public Safety's (SCDPS) Office of Highway Safety and Justice Programs (OHSJP) serves as the State Administrative Agency (SAA) of the JAG Program. Since the passage of the Justice for All Reauthorization Act (JFAA) in 2019, states are required to submit comprehensive statewide strategic plans with their JAG federal applications. Every five years, a new comprehensive strategic plan must be submitted with the federal grant application, detailing the state's funding priorities, how these priorities were identified, and how JAG is expected to be allocated within and among the nine program areas.

In accordance with the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968, as amended, South Carolina's *Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2024-2028 State Strategy* is focused on the overall goal to promote safe communities through the reduction of crime; with a special focus on drugs, violent crime, mental health and the increased focus on officer retention and recruitment. To ensure that this strategic plan considers all parts of the criminal justice system, the OHSJP will work to coordinate and collaborate with all key stakeholders to identify resource needs within these areas of focus.

The OHSJP began its strategic planning with data collection and research on the state level, followed by conversations on the local level with current subgrantees on the current state of the justice system and resource needs. In May of 2023, the SAA's office partnered with the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA) to develop and distribute a stakeholder engagement survey to inform the JAG priorities. Through a collaborative effort, NCJA and SCDPS collaborated to create and distribute a 25-question survey to a broad spectrum of justice system partners to help determine statewide criminal justice priorities. While this survey provided valuable information, the strategic plan must also include guidance from the governor, state legislators, as well as all key stakeholders within the justice system.

## EDWARD BYRNE JUSTICE ASSISTANCE GRANT (JAG) PROGRAM

In general, JAG funds awarded to a state may be used to hire additional personnel and/or purchase equipment, supplies, contractual support, training, technical assistance, and information systems for criminal justice or civil proceedings, including for any one or more of the following program areas:

1. Law enforcement programs.
2. Prosecution and court programs.
3. Prevention and education programs.
4. Corrections and community corrections programs.
5. Drug treatment and enforcement programs.
6. Planning, evaluation, and technology improvement programs.
7. Crime victim and witness programs (other than compensation).
8. Mental health programs and related law enforcement and corrections programs, including behavioral programs and crisis intervention teams.
9. Implementation of state crisis intervention court proceedings and related programs or initiatives, including, but not limited to, mental health courts, drug courts, veterans courts, and extreme risk protection order programs.

## **SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICE OF HIGHWAY SAFETY AND JUSTICE PROGRAMS**

The South Carolina Department of Public Safety's Office of Highway Safety and Justice Programs is the State Administrative Agency (SAA) for the JAG program as well as several other criminal/juvenile justice grant programs to include the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment (RSAT) for State Prisoners Grant Program, the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program, the Patrick Leahy Bulletproof Vest Partnership Program, and the Title II Formula Grants Program. The SAA is an agency within a state designated by the Governor to manage and administer criminal justice funding on behalf of the state. The SAA leverages funds to meet state and community needs as they emerge in response to the economic and social climate.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN DEVELOPMENT**

#### **I. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT SURVEY**

##### **Methodology:**

The South Carolina Department of Public Safety's Office of Highway Safety and Justice Programs partnered with the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA) to distribute a stakeholder engagement survey to inform JAG priorities. NCJA and SCDPS collaborated to create and distribute a 25-question survey to a broad spectrum of justice system partners to help determine statewide criminal justice priorities. The survey sought input from stakeholders on criminal justice challenges, priority purpose areas for funding, priority project types and initiatives within JAG purpose areas, and data needs.

The 25-question survey was distributed to justice system partners and stakeholders via email beginning on March 23, 2023. The survey closed on April 12, 2023. There were 148 responses across the state and justice system, including: law enforcement, prosecution, courts, victims' services and assistance, social services, behavioral health, education and youth, and more.

##### **Survey Results:**

##### **Demographics**

The Stakeholder Survey captured responses from a wide range of demographics. Most survey respondents serve both rural and urban areas (61%). The remaining respondents primarily serve either rural (23%) or urban (16%) areas. Additionally, most survey respondents represent local government agencies (49%). The remaining respondents represent state government (30%), private sector/nonprofit providers (16%) and others, including tribal and university representatives.

When asked to identify their role, or the role of their agency, within the criminal justice system, law enforcement represented the greatest number of respondents (47%). Law enforcement was followed by behavioral health (11%), and other roles including education, social services, mentoring, coroner, reentry, housing, and forensics (8%). The remaining respondents represented prosecution, courts, juvenile justice, corrections, probation, social services, victims' services, and education/youth services. While many stakeholders were represented, several stakeholders, such as defense and parole, were not represented.

Additionally, the large representation of law enforcement (47%) could have skewed the data to over represent issues law enforcement agencies face.

### **Criminal Justice Challenges**

Participants were asked to identify the most challenging issues facing their agency. The top five responses included opioids/methamphetamine/other drugs (53%), workforce/hiring qualified staff (50%), mental health/suicide prevention (43%), violent crime (43%), and property crime (39%). Other issues identified with high percentages were gun violence (32%), assault/sexual assault and other crimes against persons (32%), and marijuana/alcohol offenses (30%).

These challenges all fall under the JAG funding priorities identified by the stakeholders, which identified law enforcement (32%), prevention and education (11%), prosecution and courts (11%), and mental health (14%) as in need of the highest percentage of JAG funding. The challenges facing agencies in South Carolina help inform the need areas to prioritize JAG funding.

### **Priority Purpose Areas for Funding**

Participants were asked to assign percentages to how they would allocate funding to each of the JAG program purpose areas. Respondents indicated allocating the most money to law enforcement (32%), followed by mental health (14%), prevention and education (11%), and prosecution and courts (11%). These program purpose areas were ranked as the four most important purpose areas across all respondents. Additionally, for each JAG purpose area, respondents were asked to select the top three areas of need within the specific purpose area. The results are as follows.

#### Law Enforcement Programs

Respondents identified workforce/hire and retain qualified staff (51%), crisis intervention/mental health/suicide prevention (35%), drug enforcement (34%), and training (34%) as the top areas of need for law enforcement programs. Other responses included violent crime reduction, school/youth related programs, gun violence prevention, and more.

#### Prosecution and Courts Programs

Respondents identified specialty courts (62%), training (42%), and gun/violent crime/gang prosecution (38%) as the highest areas of need for prosecution and courts programs. Other responses included court technology and court security.

#### Prevention and Education Programs

When asked to select the top three areas of need for prevention and education programs, substance abuse prevention (62%), domestic violence prevention (46%), and gun violence (39%) were the top responses. Other top responses included suicide prevention (29%) and gang prevention and education (21%).

#### Mental Health Programs

When asked to select the top three areas of need for mental health programs, evaluation/assessment (63%), crisis intervention team training and support (54%), and residential inpatient behavioral health treatment programs (42%) were the top responses. Other responses included outpatient/community-based behavioral health programs, workforce/hire and retain qualified staff, and suicide risk assessment.

## II. OTHER COORDINATING EFFORTS

In the development of South Carolina's *State Strategy*, a variety of information-gathering techniques and analytical procedures were used to identify successful federal, state, and local efforts and to respond to the specific needs and concerns throughout South Carolina. The process attempted to include as many points of view as possible and all significant competing interests. This information was compared to the criminal justice data gathered during the past year and to previous State Strategies. This plan examines the nature and extent of the problem, summarizes current efforts, and promotes coordination of efforts by illustrating existing state and local collaboration activities.

Implementation of the Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program in South Carolina has been a cooperative effort among federal, state, and local agencies working to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system. A wide array of programs and projects have been initiated through JAG and subsequently supported by state or local monies once grant funding was no longer available. As the SAA, the OHSJP conducts site monitoring visits and attends subgrantee Task Force Governing Board meetings that often provide valuable insights into criminal justice needs in the state.

The OHSJP is also responsible for the following criminal/juvenile justice grant programs: Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (SCIP), Residential Substance Abuse Treatment for State Prisoners, Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Program, Bulletproof Vest Partnership, Project Safe Neighborhoods (Fiscal Agent), Title II JJ Formula, and Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program. The criminal justice program staff coordinate during the review of grants on projects that impact areas of specific interest to another grant program and coordinate ways in which these funds can be leveraged for maximum impact.

In addition, the criminal justice program staff also coordinate with several Advisory Boards tasked with determining areas of need, funding priorities, and implementation strategies.

- **The South Carolina Public Safety Coordinating Council (SCPSCC):** The SCPSCC was created to administer certain responsibilities of the SCDPS and coordinate certain activities among the Department, SLED, and municipal and county law enforcement agencies. As part of its responsibilities, the SCPSCC oversees the process for the solicitation of applications for public safety grants and reviews and approves the disbursement of funds. Members of the SCPSCC include the Governor or his designee, the Attorney General or his designee, the Chief of SLED, the Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, the Chairman of the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee, the Director of the SCDPS or their representative(s), a Sheriff, Chief of Police, and a victim of crime representative. Additionally, the SC Attorney General may designate a victim with a history of victimization to serve on the council.
- **The Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Council (GJJAC):** This Council was created by South Carolina statute (Section 23-4-210) in 1975 in accordance with the requirements of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (Section 223(a)). Its members, appointed by the Governor, are volunteer, private citizens with an abiding interest and training in children's issues as well as representatives from state and local government agencies involved in juvenile justice and delinquency prevention. The GJJAC serves as South Carolina's State Advisory Group (SAG) which is charged with the responsibility of advising policy makers on the state level about areas of need related to children and the juvenile justice system, recommending improvements in

juvenile justice services and offering technical assistance to state and local agencies in planning and implementing programs for the improvement of juvenile justice.

- **The State Crisis Intervention (SCIP) Advisory Board:** As a condition of the Byrne SCIP grant program, a diverse State Crisis Intervention Advisory Board was established to inform and guide the state's related gun violence reduction programs/initiatives. Members of the Advisory Board include individuals representing local law enforcement, the community, courts, prosecution, behavioral health providers, victim services, and legal counsel.
- **The US Attorney's Office Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) Task Force:** The PSN grant program is implemented through the United States Attorney's Office (USAO) for the District of South Carolina. The OHSJP has been designated to serve as the fiscal agent for the sub-grant programs each year the funds have been distributed on a formula basis. The PSN Task Force is tasked with identifying areas of need, determining funding priorities, and creating a non-federal group of individuals for the Grant Selection Committee. The OHSJP coordinates with the Grant Selection Committee on the review and recommendations of sub grant programs.

The SCDPS and the OHSJP are also involved, both directly and indirectly, in many efforts to recognize and address the criminal justice needs and concerns within the state. These efforts involve federal, state, and local agencies and funding. Some examples are:

- **South Carolina Law Enforcement Division's (SLED) Criminal Justice Information Center (CJIS):** CJIS is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the central statewide crime information center. CJIS is comprised of the Central Records Repository, the South Carolina Incident Based Reporting System (SCIBRS), and the NCIC Audit/Training Unit. CJIS conducts and disseminates crime analysis information, and provides criminal identification and records information to SLED components, state and local agencies, and the FBI. SLED provides the OHSJP with criminal justice data through SCIBRS for strategic planning purposes.
- **South Carolina Opioid Emergency Response Team:** With the Governor's Executive Order 2017-42, the South Carolina Opioid Emergency Response Team (SCOERT) was created on December 28, 2017. The team is comprised of over two dozen organizations focused on reducing opioid activity and offering addiction rehabilitation services. The team is led by the chief of SLED and SCDAODAS. The team is comprised of several state agencies to include SCDPS, SCDC, SCDJJ, SCDSS, SCDPPPS and DHEC. The team also includes the USAO-SC as well as the SC Commission of Prosecution Coordination, SC Coroner's Association, and the SC Sheriff's Association. The SCOERT developed an Opioid Emergency Response Plan in June 2018 to prevent and treat the misuse of prescription opioids and use of illicit opioids in order to strengthen public health, security, safety, and the economic well-being of South Carolina.
- **South Carolina Attorney General's Office, Crime Victim Services Division:** The Crime Victims Services Division provides assistance including financial compensation, grants, training, certification, and liaison assistance to eligible crime victims and service providers in South Carolina. The OHSJP coordinates with the Crime Victims Services Division when possible to braid federal funding allocations to maximize impact and outcomes.



- **Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council:** The Charleston County Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) is a collaborative council of criminal justice system leaders and community representatives that studies trends, identifies common challenges and implements strategies to address them. The vision of the CJCC is to foster a criminal justice system that is fair, just and equitably applied. In addition, the mission of the CJCC is to assist in making sustainable, data-driven improvements to Charleston County’s criminal justice system and thereby improve public safety and community well-being. Since its inception in 2015, the CJCC has taken a collaborative and data-guided approach to improve Charleston’s criminal justice system with an ongoing commitment to accountability and transparency. The OHSJP attends council meetings that often provide valuable insight into criminal justice needs in the Charleston County area.

## PRIORITIES

The South Carolina Department of Public Safety’s (SCDPS) Office of Highway Safety and Justice Programs (OHSJP) identified law enforcement programs, prosecution and court programs, drug treatment and enforcement programs and mental health programs as its funding priorities for this strategic planning period. By analyzing the Stakeholder Survey results and the data collected from the other coordination efforts, the OHSJP plans to focus funding efforts on drugs, violent crime, mental health, and officer retention/recruitment.

### LAW ENFORCEMENT PROGRAMS

**Priority Efforts:** Hire and retain qualified staff, drug enforcement, training, and equipment

**Description of Programs:**

- Officer Recruitment and Retention: The purpose of this program is to assist law enforcement agencies in recruiting and retaining officers by providing funding to create or enhance officer recruitment and retention programs/efforts.
- Crisis intervention/mental health/suicide prevention: The purpose of this program is to create or support law enforcement-based programs, training, and technology.
- Drug enforcement: The primary goal of this program is to increase drug enforcement through the creation of narcotics investigators, multijurisdictional task forces, and specialized training for law enforcement to improve effectiveness in strategies for combatting drug uses and overdose.
- Gangs/Violent Crime Enforcement: The primary purpose of this program is to improve investigations of crimes that are committed by individuals and organizations through the creation of specialized investigators, multijurisdictional task forces, and specialized training for law enforcement. A secondary purpose is to take a proactive stance in an effort to prevent further victimization and identify the alleged perpetrators, and secure the evidence involved.
- Training: The purpose of this program is to increase officer training to help them deal with specialized crime, such as domestic violence, gang violence, and drug offenses.
- Equipment: The broad goal of this program is to increase the ability of agencies to properly equip their personnel. This, in turn, increases officer safety, as well as the ability to enforce laws and solve cases.

**Performance Measures:**

- Number of additional officers and investigators hired.
- Number of cases investigated.

- Number of training programs attended and certifications.
- Reduction in repair costs compared to old equipment.
- Number of times equipment used.
- Number of training courses related to equipment use.

### **PROSECUTION AND COURTS PROGRAMS**

**Priority Efforts:** Specialty courts, training, gun/violent crime/gang prosecution, and court technologies

**Description of Programs:**

- Specialty courts: The primary goal of this program is to create specialty courts to take on specialized crime cases (e.g., drug and violent crime, domestic violence) to reduce the overall caseload on courts and achieve higher conviction rates in a shorter period of time.
- Training: The purpose of this program is to provide training to prosecutors to more effectively prosecute specialized crime cases.
- Gun, violent crime, and gang prosecution: The goal of this program is to improve the investigation of gun-related crime, violent crime, and gang-related crime by supporting multijurisdictional task forces and centers that specialize in specific crimes.
- Court technologies: The primary goal of this program is to increase the effectiveness and availability of technology in court to decrease the time spent processing cases and make information more easily accessible to prosecutors and defenders.

**Performance Measures:**

- Number of additional prosecutors and other judicial personnel hired.
- Number of cases prosecuted.
- Number of pending cases by age of the case.
- Number of training programs attended and certifications.

### **PREVENTION AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

**Priority Efforts:** Substance abuse, domestic violence, gun violence, and gang prevention education

**Description of Programs:**

- Substance abuse prevention: Law enforcement-based programs of this nature will support and create resources and materials to educate individuals and families of the effects of substance abuse.
- Domestic violence: Current domestic violence funded programs educate the community on domestic violence through community meetings and reduce the number of domestic violence incidents and cases through the active and successful prosecution of cases.
- Gun violence: These programs are intended to provide defendants with a history of mental health issues and domestic violence with additional services in an effort to reduce gun violence.
- Multijurisdictional task force programs: The primary goal of this program is to prevent violent crimes through the operation of multijurisdictional task forces which provides specialized training for law enforcement to improve the effectiveness in strategies for combatting substance abuse, violent crimes, and gang activity.

**Performance Measures:**

- Number of cases investigated.
- Number of offenders arrested.
- Number of charges made by offense.
- Number of training courses grant personnel attended.
- Number of public awareness presentations made.

**MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS AND RELATED LAW ENFORCEMENT/CORRECTIONS PROGRAMS**

**Priority Efforts:** Evaluation and assessment of mental health disorders, officer wellness and suicide prevention, and Crisis Intervention Team training and support

**Description of Programs:**

- Evaluation and assessment of mental disorders: The purpose of this program is to provide training for officers that assists them in evaluating mental disorders when responding to a call.
- Officer wellness/suicide prevention: The purpose of this program is to improve the delivery of and access to mental health and wellness services.
- Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training and support: The goal of this program is to support the creation of CITs to respond more effectively to crisis calls, as well as support these teams to grow and continue specialized training.

**Performance Measures:**

- Number of mental health training programs attended and certifications.
- Number of officers resigning, taking leave, or getting injured in the field.
- Number of new officers.

## DATA AND ANALYSIS

As explained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), its Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program is a “nationwide, cooperative statistical effort of nearly 18,000 city, university and college, county, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies voluntarily reporting data on crimes brought to their attention.” In South Carolina the UCR Program is known as the South Carolina Incident-Based Reporting System (SCIBRS), and it is managed by the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED). SLED provides support to law enforcement agencies through auditing, training, and guidance on coding individual incidents. SLED also stores every incident submitted by the law enforcement agencies on a state repository and submits those same incidents to the FBI UCR unit.

South Carolina benefits from one of the best crime reporting systems in the nation, and has a history of leading in this arena. It was the first state to implement an operational state UCR program in 1973. Following this implementation, SLED continued to improve the completeness, quality, and accuracy of crime reporting in the state by including greater detail about the circumstances of crime and by instituting a records management system. The FBI took notice, and developed its National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) based on this South Carolina system.

The FBI selected SLED to run a pilot of a new NIBRS-compatible system (what would become SCIBRS), and nine local law enforcement agencies participated from March 1, 1987 through September 30, 1987. In the following year, the FBI presented the new system at the National UCR Conference, with attendees voting

for the FBI to manage the new incident-based reporting system. In 1991, the state system managed by SLED enjoyed the honor of being the first program certified to report NIBRS-compatible crime data to the FBI. More than 18,000 law enforcement agencies nationwide report data to the FBI UCR Program. Currently, there are approximately 275 reporting agencies in South Carolina.

The incident-based approach of SCIBRS provides far more crime information than summary reporting systems. It should be noted, nevertheless, that any crime reporting system has its limitations, including the fact that unreported crimes are not included. For this reason, the crime statistics referenced here cannot fully represent crime. Rather, these statistics are a lower bound of actual crime. These lower bounds of crime are taken to be comparable across jurisdictions falling under the FBI's UCR Program. Other sources and methods are necessary for the most complete view of crime. Keeping this context in mind, the crime data from SCIBRS still provide an immense resource.

The following data was collected to identify challenging issues facing the state and inform state priorities. The challenging issues facing South Carolina are drugs, violent crime to include gangs and domestic violence, mental health, and officer retention and recruitment.

## DRUGS

### **State Geography and Infrastructure**

Although South Carolina is a small state, ranking fortieth of the fifty states in terms of total land area, the state has a coastline of 187 miles and a system of intra-coastal waterways that reaches beyond its borders to the southern tip of Florida. The seacoast has numerous bays and harbors as well as the major Atlantic seaport of Charleston.

South Carolina's highway system includes five numbered interstate routes- 95, 20, 26, 77, and 85. These corridors and the state's rail system allow for effective passage of contraband to and from northern, southern, and western points of supply and distribution. In addition, South Carolina has numerous county and 131 private airstrips that provide another source of transit for operations in the importation of cocaine and marijuana.

South Carolina continues to be extremely vulnerable as an importation base and transit area for illicit drugs bound for the eastern seaboard of the United States. With its extensive coastline, numerous rural airstrips, and matrix of interstate highways, South Carolina represents an attractive trans-shipment point.

### **State Overview**

According to data provided by the 2019 Atlanta-Carolinas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area's Threat Assessment, South Carolina is increasingly documented as a trans-shipment corridor for all manners of illicit drugs and drug proceeds. There is increasing evidence of organizational activity extending to major distribution hubs such as New York City, Southern Florida, Southern Texas/Mexico, and Southern California. South Carolina, where I-20, I-26 and I-77 intersect with I-95 and I-85, is strategically located mid-way between Miami and New York City. South Carolina's location is ideal for trans-shipping contraband throughout the Eastern Seaboard. From Mexico and the Southwest Border States, traffickers travel on I-20 and I-85 to supply northeastern states with cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, heroin, and fentanyl.

The number of Mexican drug-trafficking cells is increasing at an alarming rate in South Carolina. These groups are importing multi-hundred kilogram quantities of cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin. Furthermore, thousands of pounds of marijuana are entering South Carolina typically from states that have decriminalized the possession of marijuana such as Colorado, Washington, California, and Oregon. The typical Mexican drug trafficker operating in South Carolina forwards drug proceeds back to the Southwest border area and Mexico by way of bulk currency shipments, money remittance services, and in private and commercial vehicles. Mexican drug traffickers are also using the state as a secondary hub for staging and distributing drugs, and consolidating illicit drug proceeds. The greatest facilitator of this process is South Carolina's geographic location and a network of national and state-owned highways that crisscross South Carolina's three major metropolitan centers and traverse its borders with Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina. The geographic proximity of the state essentially makes a section of the state a suburb to Charlotte, North Carolina. Some Mexican, Asian, Canadian, and other international drug traffickers use wire remitter/wire transfer services and structured currency transactions that fall under the Bank Secrecy Act reporting requirement threshold. Over the past several years Mexican-manufactured Ice availability has accelerated. This methamphetamine is either converted from a liquid form domestically or imported in a crystal form directly from Mexico. Mexican money-laundering specialists use South Carolina to accumulate large quantities of illegal drug proceeds from both inside and outside of the state, and then forward bulk shipments at times in excess of a million dollars to Mexico.

South Carolina is additionally a distribution point for Mexican marijuana and locally grown marijuana. Recently, there has been a developing trend of bulk shipments of Colorado-grown marijuana being transported to the state by organized drug trafficking groups. Recent seizures revealed Asian groups are responsible for transporting the Colorado marijuana into the state utilizing the highway system. There is also an ongoing trend of cartels sending representatives who establish remote marijuana grows on public land in the state. Meth continues to be manufactured and used by the local population in South Carolina, as well as imported from Mexico. Over the past year, there has been a sharp increase in the use and availability of heroin in the state. Seizures have been made targeting both Mexican heroin traffickers and domestic traffickers moving supplies of Colombian and Mexican heroin into the region from New York and Mexico. The abuse of controlled pharmaceuticals in South Carolina is increasing at an epidemic rate. Lower-income Caucasians are the predominant abusers, but middle and upper-class households have also been found to abuse these drugs. According to investigations by the USDEA Columbia Diversion Group, OxyContin®, methadone, Fentanyl, and hydrocodone pose the greatest concerns. These Schedule II and III drugs are usually taken with benzodiazepines and Soma®. The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) states that in 2021, there were 136 deaths involving heroin and 1,733 deaths involving opioids. There were also 1,853 deaths involving prescription drugs and 1,494 deaths involving fentanyl.

The unlawful cultivation, manufacture, distribution, sale, purchase, use, possession, transportation, or importation of any controlled drug or narcotic substance are drug/narcotic violations. In 2021, SCIBRS shows 31,638 arrests for drug/narcotic violations. Marijuana was involved in 49% of these arrests, making it—by far—the most indicated drug in drug/narcotic violations arrests. The second most indicated drug in these arrests was amphetamines/methamphetamines, which were involved in 21% of drug/narcotic violations arrests. The drug offense rate increased 26.7% from 2012 to 2021, showing a great increase in drug violations throughout the state. The most common drug offense is possession at 75.7%, followed by distributing/selling at 14.1%.

According to SCDC, in FY 2022, more inmates were admitted for dangerous drug offenses than any other offense classification other than homicide. Of the total number of inmates admitted, 17.6 percent (2,891 inmates) were incarcerated for dangerous drugs.

South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster signed a fentanyl trafficking bill into law in August, 2023 to increase the penalties for trafficking fentanyl in the state. With this bill, possession of two grams of fentanyl or a fentanyl related substance is a felony, and the bill makes fentanyl a Schedule I drug in South Carolina. This bill will help decrease the rate of fentanyl entering the state. SCDHEC reported 1,494 fentanyl overdose deaths in 2021, which is four times the number of fentanyl overdose deaths in 2017. The fentanyl trafficking bill will aid in decreasing the fentanyl overdose rate throughout the state and is the first step in decreasing fentanyl use in South Carolina.

### **VIOLENT CRIME**

The offenses of murder/non-negligent manslaughter, sexual battery, robbery, and aggravated assault comprise violent crime. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, nationwide in 2019 there were 366.7 victims of violent crime for every 100,000 people. South Carolina exceeded this nationwide rate with 511.3 victims of violent crime for every 100,000 people, placing the state as the sixth most violent state out of all 50 states. In the same year, South Carolina had the sixth highest murder rate in the nation and the sixth highest rate for aggravated assault.

Breaking these numbers down at the state level, there were 27,300 victims of violent crime reported to police in 2021, which can be understood as 52.59 victims of violent crime per 10,000 people. In terms of specific offenses, the crimes reported to police included 561 victims of murder and non-negligent manslaughter; 2,515 victims of rape; 2,639 victims of robbery; and 21,580 victims of aggravated assault. In SLED's 2021 Crime in South Carolina Annual Report, the five counties with the highest violent crime rates per 10,000 individuals are Dillon at 164, Orangeburg at 145, Darlington at 110, Marlboro at 92, and Florence at 92. Because a victim on any given incident report can suffer multiple offenses, the number of victims of violent crime will be less than the number of constituent offenses.

#### **Murder**

Crime in South Carolina Annual Report presented by SLED reports that the murder rate in South Carolina increased by 0.89% from 2020 to 2021 with the highest murder rate since 1991. In 2021, there were 566 murders in SC, which is a sharp increase from 362 in 2016. Of the 566 murders in 2021, 85.85% involved a firearm, which demonstrates a need for firearms testing throughout the state.

#### **Gangs**

According to the Columbia Division of the FBI, despite years of enforcement activity, the threat posed by violent gangs in South Carolina is high. Investigative and intelligence efforts to mitigate the threat posed by violent gangs have been the number one focus of the FBI's criminal program in South Carolina for the past several years. Gang activity tends to follow a cyclical pattern, with upswings followed by downturns based on a range of factors, such as the arrest and incarceration of influential gang leaders, increased gang membership, and the formation of new gang sects. Traditionally, gangs in South Carolina engage in drug dealing, robbery, burglary, auto theft, and home invasions. Gangs have spread across the state, migrating from urban areas to suburban and rural communities to recruit new members, expand drug distribution territories, and form new alliances, bringing increased criminal activity to communities once thought to be immune from gang violence and drug activity.

The predominant gang affiliations in South Carolina continue to be the nationally-based United Blood Nation (UBN), Folk Nation (FN), and Neighborhood-Based Gangs (NBGs). The FBI has identified Crips (West Coast US-based); Sur 13 (El Salvador-based); 18th Street (Honduras-based); and other ethnic- and geographic-based gangs operating across the state. In areas such as Sumter, SC, the FBI has seen Bloods and Crips unite under a banner they call “Tha Movement” in order to drive out non-gang-affiliated drug traffickers so they can control the drug trade. As of April 29, 2020, SLED identified that gang-related offenses in South Carolina held steady during the previous three years at about 800 cases annually. Gang members are roughly four times more likely to use a gun and two-and-a-half times more likely to have an underage perpetrator than other types of crime.

Gang activity continues to weave its way throughout various violent crimes in South Carolina. According to an article titled, *Final gang members sentenced in South Carolina’s largest RICO conspiracy*, for FOX Carolina, 40 defendants were prosecuted in federal court against a branch of the nationwide Folk Nation Gang, the Insane Gangster Disciples (IGD) – this criminal enterprise included inmates from within the South Carolina Dept. of Corrections (SCDC) and used contraband cell phones to continue gang operations. “Since the initial indictment in this case, officials said all charged defendants have pleaded guilty to conspiracy under the Racketeer Influenced Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act, the Violent Crimes in Aid of Racketeering (VICAR) statute, or to conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute narcotics. Nineteen of the 40 defendants in the case were sentenced on racketeering charges and 21 other defendants were sentenced to charges involving narcotics distribution, possession and firearms offenses.

Quoted content - “ATF joined our local, state, and federal partners in a very dedicated and focused effort to make a long-lasting impact on the level of gun violence and gang activity in South Carolina,” said Acting Special Agent in Charge Brian Mein of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). “We brought some extremely dangerous individuals to justice and recovered over a hundred firearms from a criminal organization intent on harming our communities. Disrupting these major criminal networks will have a significant impact on public safety across the state.”

The FBI, which only has 12 gang investigators in South Carolina, attacked the gang problem by joining forces with local and state law enforcement partners through the Safe Streets Task Force (SSTF) initiative. The FBI operates three Violent Gang SSTFs located in the Columbia, Greenville, and Florence areas, which aggressively target the violent gang threat using the enterprise theory of investigation. The Task Forces routinely attain temporary decreases in gang activity, to include drug dealing and violence, in communities where investigations resulted in large-scale federal arrest operations. Unfortunately, post-arrest gang activity typically subsides for only a brief period until new leadership takes hold and the gang once again becomes a significant threat, or another gang moves to take over the drug market “vacuum” resulting from the disruption of the previous gang. Combating the gang threat remains difficult, as violent gangs continually recruit new members from middle schools, high schools, and the prison system. Due to increased gang activity across the state, the FBI has expanded the scope of its existing SSTFs to cover the metropolitan areas of Charleston, Myrtle Beach, and Rock Hill.

In addition to the FBI, the South Carolina Department of Corrections (SCDC) has long been a strong partner in anti-gang efforts across the state. As of June 19, 2019, the SCDC’s Security Threat Group (STG) Unit had identified 2,566 inmates as being affiliated with gangs. Of these, they have identified 48 total gangs within the SCDC. The Bloods, Folk Nation, Five Percenters, and Crips boast the highest number of affiliated inmates. The White Supremacy, Aryan Brotherhood, Gangster Disciples, and Insane Gangster Disciples have the next highest number of affiliated inmates. The SCDC is a significant source of gang information, as all inmates are closely monitored for indications of gang membership or association. The STG has

maintained a practice of evidence collection and documentation including gang paraphernalia, mug shots, and photographs of tattoos.

### **Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence remains a serious problem for the state of South Carolina. South Carolina has ranked amongst the ten most dangerous states for women, with a homicide rate about twice the national average. When considering only violent offenses (murder/non-negligent manslaughter, sexual battery, robbery, and aggravated assault), the 2021 SCIBRS data shows 5,517 victims who were in (or had once been in) intimate relationships with their attackers. When considering the offenses of simple assault, intimidation, kidnapping/abduction, and fondling in addition to violent crimes, there were 32,774 victims who were in (or had once been in) intimate relationships with their attackers.

According to the 2021 SCIBRS data; of the 59 people who died due to domestic violence, 39 were female victims and 20 were male victims. The demographics of the victims were as follows: 31% were White and 66% were African American. Guns were the primary weapon used in homicides and, in 65% of the cases, a gunshot wound was listed as the primary cause of death. Knives were used in 15% of the cases, and 20% were from other causes.

The 2021 Crime in South Carolina Annual Report found that 58% of victim-to-offender relationships were classified as boyfriend/girlfriend and 32% as spouse. The rate of intimate murder increased 13.7% from 2020 to 2021. Additionally, intimate murder increased by 36% from 2020 to 2021 in female victim/male offender relationships.

### **Other Violent Crimes**

The 2021 Crime in South Carolina Annual Report presented by SLED reports 2,515 cases of sexual battery in 2021. The data indicates 91.25% of victims were female and 49.73% of victims were under 18. There were 21,580 instances of aggravated assault in 2021 with 51.88% of victims being male and 48.12% being female. Additional data indicates 44.35% of aggravated assault instances involved a firearm, and 28.49% were committed by an intimate partner. There were 2,639 robberies in 2021 with 54.96% involving a firearm.

## **MENTAL HEALTH**

Mental health issues continue to rise throughout the state of South Carolina. According to the SC Behavioral Health 2021 Progress Report, 4.7% of adults 18 and over experienced serious mental illness in 2017-2019, a 1.4% increase from 2008-2010. Additionally, the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that serious mental health issues have more than doubled in adults ages 18 to 25 and have increased across all ages. For example, the Richland County Sheriff's Office received 789 mental health assistance calls in 2020 and 758 in 2021. These calls include follow-up activities that include assessments, and referrals to additional services. In addition, outreach is conducted to offer services and support to reduce recidivism.

COVID-19 has also exacerbated existing mental health issues, with most available data not demonstrating this change. This exemplifies a need for researchers and statisticians to collect such data in the wake of the pandemic. Without data specific to SC, the OHSJP cannot determine the exact mental health situation throughout the state and which mental health programs to prioritize in funding. The OHSJP plans to



establish a research partnership with a reputable organization to collect data in order to better understand the challenges faced by the state in regards to mental health.

While data specific to SC has yet to be collected, the SC Behavioral Health 2021 Progress Report found that 12.5% of adults in the southeast seriously considered suicide in the last 30 days during the period of June 24-30, 2020. The southeast region includes SC and had the highest percentage of the four geographic regions in the report. Additionally, the suicide rate per 100,000 people in 2019 in SC was 16.2. This rate is higher than SC's neighbors Georgia and North Carolina. One South Carolina resident takes their life every 12 hours, and more people die by suicide in the state than by homicide.

According to the Behavioral Health Barometer SC Volume 6 conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, of all adults in SC with any mental illness, only 48.5% received treatment. This demonstrates that few people in SC are receiving the treatment they need, which in turn makes mental illness worse and can lead to co-occurring substance use disorders to cope with mental illness. The Stakeholder Survey found that co-occurring substance use disorders were a concern within the state, and national data supports this concern. The 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that 17 million adults had both a substance abuse disorder and mental illness.

The South Carolina Department of Mental Health (SCDMH) reports that involuntary admissions account for all 300 admissions to the Harris Psychiatric Hospital in Anderson and all 800 admissions to the Bryan Psychiatric Hospital in Columbia. Additionally, around 70% of the 1,500 individuals admitted to the Morris Village Alcohol and Drug Addiction treatment Center in Columbia are involuntarily admitted.

In light of mental health challenges throughout SC, SCDMH is working to implement new programs. One such program involves mobile crisis teams that are available on weekends and late at night. These teams will help reduce crime rates because individuals will be able to receive treatment instead of committing a crime and going to jail. The SCDMH has also placed therapists in 620 schools around the state to help identify and treat mental health issues in youth so that they do not carry into adulthood.

## COURTS

According to the South Carolina Commission on Prosecution Coordination's (SCCPC) *2022 Accountability Report*, the SCCPC continued its partnerships with the Circuit Directors of Diversion Programs in the sixteen circuits, other program coordinators, and the Commission's Task Force on Diversion Programs to continue coordination of effort and processes among diversion programs across the state and improve accessibility to data on statewide diversion program participation. The SCCPC also continued its management of two longstanding grant awards and a two-year grant awarded in FY 21. The two-year "Innovative Prosecution Solutions" grant awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) has allowed the SCCPC to begin work on the agency's database project. Furthermore, the SCCPC continued to update several statutorily required reports and the formats thereof to streamline and simplify the process for both the SCCPC and the solicitors' offices, clarify the parameters of requested data for solicitor staff responsible for gathering data, and improve the accuracy of data in final statewide reports. Despite these improvements, the compilation of data collected, and preparation of final reports are hindered by the lack of a database at the SCCPC and inconsistency in the availability and calculation of data provided by the solicitors' offices.

Criminal justice professionals continue to report that delays in the judicial process, further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, hinder effective prosecution. Further, a lack of resources cause delays in

prosecution, increased backlogs, victims waiting for extended periods of time for their cases to be heard, an increase in the number of inmates in the local jail, as well as violent offenders being released on bond and thereby committing more crimes while they await trial.

One funding priority of the new Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (SCIP) is to fund specialized court-based programs such as drug, mental health, and veteran's treatment courts, including those that specifically accept clients with firearm violations.

### **OFFICER RETENTION/RECRUITMENT**

According to the South Carolina Department of Administration, Division of State Human Resources's (DSHR) Law Enforcement Compensation Analysis Report of February 2022, officer retention has become a major issue across all levels of agencies. Specifically noted are the following reasons:

1. Fewer people are applying to become police officers. 2. More officers are leaving their departments — and, in many cases, leaving the policing profession — well before they reach retirement age. 3. A growing number of current officers are becoming eligible for retirement. In addition, a recent Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) Special Report states law enforcement chief executives reported increases in resignations were more significant.

Agencies reported an overall 18% increase in the resignation rate in 2020-21, compared to 2019-20. Increases in retirements were even larger. Among all responding police departments, there was a 45% increase in the retirement rate. (In small departments, a small number of retirements may result in a high percentage increase in the retirement rate. But even in the largest agencies, with 500 or more officers, the retirement rate increased by 27%.)

These findings also align with the findings of a 2021 Vacancy Survey conducted by the South Carolina Sheriffs' Association and other law enforcement organizations which found that approximately 18.8% of all full-time positions in the Police Officer Retirement System (PORS) were vacant. Additionally, one of the questions posed in the survey was "why is your agency struggling to fill vacancies." According to the report, the most common responses were pay, competition with the private sector, competition with surrounding agencies, benefits, burn out and public scrutiny.

## **RESOURCE NEEDS**

Law enforcement officers; judges; and treatment, prevention and education professionals across South Carolina are working to maximize services as budgets remain flat or decline. With extremely tight state and local budgets, JAG funding is essential in many instances for agencies to implement needed programs. Even so, financial resources to fund more personnel, equipment, and supplies are not the only needs identified by criminal justice agencies. Increasingly, improved coordination among federal, state, and local criminal justice agencies is cited as a way to maximize resources. Innovative minds in all areas of criminal justice are exploring the uses of automation, computers, and emerging technologies to reduce the time necessary to complete routine tasks, free personnel for more important work, and gain greater accountability. Finally, leaders in criminal justice are increasingly focused on the evaluation of existing programs and methods to ensure that available funding is spent effectively. The following is a summary of resource needs in the South Carolina criminal justice system.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT PROGRAMS

As law enforcement resources decrease and caseload numbers increase, South Carolina continues to support the placement of specialized investigators in local law enforcement agencies that demonstrate a need. Law enforcement officials who have assessed their agency's present methods or progress in combating a particular area of crime have come to the conclusion that there is greater success if one investigator or a group of investigators concentrate on one aspect of criminality in their jurisdiction. This can play an important role in reducing the number of incidents and increasing the number of cases that are prosecuted.

As officers become specialized in the types of cases they handle, the importance of receiving appropriate training continues to grow. Narcotics officers can benefit from courses on conducting undercover drug buys and keeping up with the methods of operation employed by those in the illegal narcotics trade. Investigators specializing in family violence (domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse) need to learn more about handling these types of crimes for their own protection and for the welfare of those involved in the incidents. With a growing Hispanic and Asian population in South Carolina, officers should also be trained in cultural factors and language to help them effectively and appropriately handle situations involving these citizens.

Law enforcement equipment continues to be a critical need for officers in South Carolina. In order to maintain the safety and security of officers as well as the public, life-saving equipment, such as body armor and 800 MHz radios, is essential in conducting daily patrol duties. Priority is given to local agencies which do not receive direct JAG awards. Additionally, crime scene investigators need the best and most modern equipment in the rapidly expanding area of forensics to examine crime scenes and evidence. The results of drug analysis, DNA testing, latent fingerprint examination, blood alcohol testing, firearms testing, and trace evidence testing must be available to state and local law enforcement agencies quickly in order to thoroughly investigate criminal cases and supply legally sufficient evidence to prosecutors. In addition, laboratory technicians and criminalists must be properly trained to conduct these tests so that they provide incontrovertible results that withstand scrutiny by judges and defense attorneys.

The lack of adequate drug-analysis facilities in law enforcement agencies has consistently been a significant contributor in the delay of prosecuting criminal cases. Until recently, the overwhelming majority of substances to be examined were submitted to SLED, and the limited number of criminologists there were unable to keep pace with the demand. Establishing regional drug analysis labs in accordance with SLED standards has been a priority. However, updated technology and equipment is still necessary to handle the volume of tests at both state and regional levels.

Favorable collaborations between and among agencies on local, state, and federal levels need to be stressed to avoid fragmentation of services and to launch successful multijurisdictional investigations. Joint operations yield more arrests and seizures of drugs and assets than any one of the agencies can attain by themselves. However, care must be taken to ensure that all participating departments are aware of their responsibilities and that cooperation and coordination with other agencies remains a top priority. The inclusion of assistant solicitors in the task forces is of great importance. Besides being on-hand to help guide the agents' investigations, they may be cross-designated as special assistant U.S. attorneys and empowered to bring a number of investigations up to the federal level for prosecution. This blending together of law enforcement and prosecutorial elements is a worthwhile trend that makes for stronger cases against offenders and better assures that court hearings proceed in a timely manner.

As noted above, officer recruitment and retention are issues across the state, as with the entire nation. The stress of understaffed departments negatively impacts the officers on the job. According to the stakeholder engagement survey and site visit interviews, agencies across the state are requesting assistance in retention efforts. This includes implementing officer wellness programs that facilitate physical, spiritual, and emotional fitness. The DSHR's report noted above specifically notes the most common responses to agency's who are struggling to fill vacancies are, "pay, competition with the private sector, competition with surrounding agencies, benefits, burn out and public scrutiny".

### **PROSECUTION AND COURT PROGRAMS**

Providing relief to the state's overburdened criminal court system through projects which enhance court system efficiency continues to be an area of need. The addition of specialized prosecutors and investigators within solicitor's offices leads to a decrease in the number of pending cases. There should be a close working relationship between prosecutors and investigators, particularly in the specialized courts. Caseload data show that funding additional personnel in solicitor's (prosecutor's) offices has been one method of attacking the problems of jail overcrowding and case backlogs. Specialized prosecution units, such as drug crime, violent crime, and domestic violence, continue to make an impact on the quality of prosecution efforts for these types of cases.

South Carolina also supports projects which focus on improving the operational effectiveness of the court process by expanding prosecutorial and judicial resources and implementing court delay reduction programs. In this area, the key components are personnel and automation. Increasing resources in one area of the justice system can have an adverse effect on other components of the system. It is important in this area to focus on coordination among all agencies to better manage the court dockets.

### **TECHNOLOGY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS**

The use of computerized information systems continues to progress, with enhancements constantly being made to the databases through which agencies access information concerning individuals in prisons and jails, dispositions of court cases, and persons with outstanding warrants. Docket management and automation at all levels of the court system continue to be a great need. The South Carolina Judicial Department's CMS has taken great strides toward the achievement of automating and connecting all levels of court. However, upgraded technology and equipment is required for local clerks and magistrates' offices to interface with the statewide CMS.

Additionally, the SCDPS Stakeholder Survey revealed that 24 percent of respondents had automated data systems which were difficult to access. Another 24 percent of respondents stated they had no automated data system, revealing a deep need for technology improvements throughout South Carolina. Additional requests included funding for the automated systems within the court systems and community services. When asked to select the top three areas of need for planning, evaluation and technology improvement, and automated information sharing - justice system partners (59%), strategic planning/determining priorities (57%), and automated information sharing community services (54%) were top responses.

## **STRATEGIC PLAN REVIEW PROCESS**

In any year in which the strategic plan is not fully updated, states must submit a brief annual report with their applications. The annual report is intended to provide a summary update of program

implementation efforts as detailed in the statewide strategic plan. The OHSJP is responsible for the development, coordination, and review and updating of the strategic plan. At a minimum, the OHSJP will assess resource needs and changing circumstances and determine how the state will adjust funding annually.

## **SUMMARY**

The JAG program has provided funding to support various initiatives, resulting in clear advancements and improvements in South Carolina's justice system. Through communication with local agencies, the expansion and replication of successful projects, and the implementation of innovative concepts, the Office of Highway Safety and Justice Programs will continue to administer funding to worthwhile projects that further the reduction of crime in South Carolina.