

Children's Justice Act

Fact Sheet

The Children's Justice Act (CJA) provides grants to States to improve the investigation, prosecution and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect, particularly child sexual abuse and exploitation, in a manner that limits additional trauma to the child victim. This also includes the handling of child fatality cases in which child abuse or neglect is suspected and some cases of children with disabilities and serious health problems who also are victims of abuse and neglect.

Currently, each Federal Fiscal Year \$17 million in CJA funds are available to the fifty (50) States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Virgin Islands. Funds are allocated in the amount of \$50,000 per State, plus an additional amount based on the population of children under 18 years of age in the applicant's jurisdiction. Funding comes from the Crime Victims' Fund, which collects fines and fees charged to persons convicted of Federal crimes. The Fund is administered by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Victims of Crime (OVC) and the grants are awarded by the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as outlined in Section 107 of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), as amended, by the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003.

Typical CJA activities:

- Developing curricula and conducting training for personnel in law enforcement and child protective services, as well as health and mental health professionals, prosecutors and judges.
- Establishing or enhancing child advocacy centers and other multidisciplinary programs to serve child victims and their families in order to minimize trauma.
- Establishing and supporting local and/or State child fatality review teams, including multidisciplinary training, team development, and annual reporting.
- Supporting the enactment of laws to improve systems response, including allowing the admission of indirect testimony of children into evidence, making the courtroom setting less intimidating to children, increasing the penalties for sexual offenses against children, requiring mandatory sentencing, shortening the trial process, and permitting victims to make statements prior to sentencing.

To be eligible for CJA funds, States must be eligible for the CAPTA Basic State Grant and are required to establish and maintain a multidisciplinary Task Force on children's justice. The Task Force is to be comprised of representatives from selected disciplines involved in handling child abuse and neglect cases.

The Task Force makes policy and training recommendations regarding methods to better handle these cases, with the expectation that it will result in reduced trauma to the child victim and the victim's family, while insuring fairness to the accused.

Every three years after the initial award, the Task Force is required by legislation to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the State's systems related to the investigative, administrative and judicial handling of child abuse, neglect and exploitation cases and child maltreatment-related fatalities and make recommendations for improvements to those systems.

* On March 10, 2000, the President signed the CAPE (Child Abuse Prevention and Enforcement) Act into law, which provides for an increase in funds for the Children's Justice Act from \$10 million to as much as \$20 million per year. Under CAPE, in any year in which the amount of fine collections in the Fund rises above the FY 1998 level of \$363 million, half of the increase up to a total of \$20 million, will go toward funding CJA.

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