SUPPORTING STATEMENT FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE 2023 CENSUS OF MEDICAL EXAMINER AND CORONER OFFICES

A. JUSTIFICATION

Overview

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) requests clearance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to administer the **2023 Census of Medical Examiner and Coroner Offices (CMEC; attachment 1)**. The survey builds on the previous administrations of the CMEC data collection that used 2004 and 2018 reference years. OMB provided a generic clearance for cognitive testing of the proposed 2023 CMEC instrument in November 2023 (OMB No. 1121-0339, expires 4/30/2025). With cognitive testing now complete, BJS seeks to proceed with data collection.

To reduce respondent burden and improve the utility of the data collection, BJS made the following revisions to the 2018 CMEC instrument. Changes to CMEC-1 for the 2023 CMEC include —

- Removing questions when the information was not critical or could be obtained elsewhere, the item applied to a minority of MEC offices, or the question proved difficult for respondents during cognitive testing.
- Reducing the data points that respondents will need to complete through the use of new skip patterns.
- Adding questions to better assess (1) resource issues in CMEC offices, including the availability of mental health and wellness resources and the extent to which staff incur out-of-pocket expenses and have access to work vehicles; (2) how autopsies are handled; (3) preparedness for mass fatality events; (4) how unidentified human remains are held, disposed of, and what biometric samples are collected prior to disposition; and (5) how offices dispose of unclaimed human remains and whether there is outreach to the Veterans Administration to determine veteran status.

BJS plans to field the 2023 CMEC from September 2024 through July 2025. The goal of the data collection is to gather and report information on the operations of the public offices that conduct medicolegal death investigations (MDI) in the United States, including their budget, staffing, and workload (e.g., referred and accepted cases, backlogs, and autopsies). Through the CMEC questionnaire, BJS will collect data on the expenditures, records and evidence retention policies, and resources

of the offices. The CMEC will also gather information on administrative characteristics of the agencies, including type of office (e.g., medical examiner or coroner), number and types of employees (e.g., forensic pathologists, death investigators, and support personnel), types of specialized death investigations, and size and type of jurisdiction served.

BJS intends to conduct the 2023 CMEC among approximately 3,000 state and local offices that meet one of the following eligibility criteria—

1. The office investigates to determine a cause and manner of death;
2. The coroner, medical examiner, or forensic pathologist within the office signs death certificates;
3. The Texas justice of the peace performs medicolegal death investigations in addition to other court-derived responsibilities; or
4. The office determines when autopsies should be performed, even if the autopsy is performed outside of the office.

These 3,000 agencies include both MEC offices and justices of the peace (JPs) in Texas.

- **MEC Offices**: Using the current National Directory of Law Enforcement Administrators (NDLEA) and list of offices maintained by the CDC's Collaborating Office for Medical Examiners and Coroners, BJS has identified about 300 new MEC offices that performed MDI work in 2023, increasing the total number of MEC offices eligible for the 2023 CMEC to approximately 2,300.
- **JPs in Texas:** To provide more comprehensive statistics on the nation's MDI work outside of the traditional MEC offices, the 2023 CMEC will include the approximately 700 justices of the peace (JPs) in Texas that make cause and manner of death determinations but were out of scope for the 2004 and 2018 CMECs. Texas is unique in how its death investigation functions are apportioned. Texas law states that once a county reaches a population of 2 million, it is required to transition to a medical examiner system. The rest of Texas has the responsibilities of death investigation assigned to local JPs, whose duties are similar to coroners in other states. The JPs provide death investigation services in the majority of Texas' 254 counties. The JPs in Texas have largely been excluded from federal surveys of MEC offices, as they also have a myriad of other responsibilities, and little is known about the death investigation system across these agencies. These offices serve about 40% of the population of Texas and represent a large body of MDI work that has not been documented in a systematic way. The 2023 CMEC will provide much-needed insight into how the MDI operations of JPs compare to those within MEC offices.

The approximately 3,000 agencies in the 2023 CMEC (including 2,300 MEC offices and 700 JPs in Texas) will receive the same questionnaire. The 700 JPs in Texas, however, will receive a specialized letter inviting them to participate as a new group in the CMEC (**Attachment 6**). As with the 2,300 MEC offices, BJS and RTI will also send nonresponse follow-up emails to the 700 JPs in Texas to encourage their participation.

Similar to the 2004 and 2018 CMEC, BJS plans to conduct a census rather than a sample survey for the 2023 CMEC. Interest among federal, state, and local agencies relies on the study to ascertain the basic needs of MEC offices nationwide. There is a known shortage of forensic pathologists and MDI staff nationwide.[1] The extent of the problem as measured by national caseload is currently based on the 2018 CMEC. The 2023 CMEC is needed to identify the national caseload of death investigation cases and the staffing in place to address this caseload since 2018, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing opioid epidemic.[2] It will also provide new insight into the work being done where JPs perform medicolegal death investigations.

With a census design, the 2023 data will comprehensively inform national, state, and local policy-making and budget planning. Information generated by the 2023 CMEC will help to improve our national understanding of MEC offices and their operations, including the Texas JPs. The information will be used by governments to assess where additional resources are needed for development, improvement, and/or expansion of criminal justice death investigation capabilities.

1. Explain the circumstances that make the collection of information necessary. Identify any legal or administrative requirements that necessitate the collection. Attach a copy of the appropriate section of each statute and regulation mandating or authorizing the collection of information.

Under Title 34, United States Code, § 10132, BJS is authorized to collect and analyze statistical information concerning the operation of the criminal justice system at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels (**Attachment 2**). BJS disseminates critical high-quality information and statistics to inform policymakers, budget directors, researchers, criminal justice practitioners, and the public. The CMEC furthers the Department of Justice's mission by providing insight into the nation's MDI system process and infrastructure to identify trends and challenges. BJS is required to protect information identifiable to a private person from unauthorized disclosure and may not publicly release data in a way that could reasonably identify a specific private person [34 U.S.C. § 10231]. CMEC data will be maintained under the security provisions outlined in U.S. Department of Justice regulations 28 CFR §22.23. The BJS Data Protection Guidelines provide more detailed information on how BJS and its data collection agents will use and protect data collected under BJS's authority.

MDI is a critical operation in the criminal justice and public safety systems that investigates all suspicious or violent deaths, helps law enforcement determine whether to pursue criminal

[1] U.S. Department of Justice. *Report to Congress: Needs assessment of forensic laboratories and medical examiner/coroner offices*. https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/253626.pdf

[2] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Provisional Data Shows U.S. Drug Overdose Deaths Top 100,000 in 2022*. https://blogs.cdc.gov/nchs/2023/05/18/7365/#:~:text=Findings%3A,2022%2C%20from%20107%2C573%20to%20105%2C452.

investigations surrounding deaths, and acts as an early warning system of instances of increased mortality related to epidemics and pandemics, drug overdoses, and biological or chemical terrorism. As such, MEC offices operate alongside and within the criminal justice system to ensure justice and public safety. These agencies are also a key contributor to statistical data on the MDI infrastructure. They contribute to federal data collections such as the CDC's National Violent Death Reporting System, the National Vital Statistics System, State Unintentional Drug Overdose Reporting System, the Enhanced State Opioid Overdose Surveillance, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Fatality Analysis Reporting System.

The CMEC is the sole source of national estimates of personnel, resources, workloads, policies, and practices of MEC offices, which agencies, such the Department of Health and Human Services, use for context to inform public health statistics. According to the previous CMEC, MEC offices had nearly 11,000 fulltime employees in 2018 and had an estimated annual budget that totaled $1.5 billion, for an average of $775,000 per office.[3] Moreover, more than 1.3 million deaths were referred to MEC offices in 2018, of which over 600,000 were investigated by their offices. There were about 11,380 unidentified human decedents in 2018, which provides a key baseline for the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ's) National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs).

NIJ's 2019 needs assessment of the forensic community to Congress highlighted that "the levels of staffing, budgets, resources, and supplies are too inconsistent to ensure that death investigations are of the same quality across the United States." Before COVID-19, Le et al. (2019) found that despite having a high-risk job, only one-third of MEC offices received training in infectious diseases.[4] Since then, state and local evidence shows the critical nature of this fragile national workforce and its pipeline, with demands on these offices increasing, with opioid related deaths[5] and homicide fatalities both rising[6], on top of the COVID-19 pandemic and an increase in public deaths in custody[7], that these offices have had to manage and adapt to. For example, in May 2023, the Oregon Medical Examiner's Division reported that they were no longer performing autopsies unless the deaths were suspicious, homicides, or child/infant deaths given the overwhelming caseload and shortage of forensic pathologists.[8] In May 2022, the Maryland Office of the Chief Medical Examiner was in danger of losing their accreditation due to chronic understaffing.[9]

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[3] U.S. Department of Justice. *Medical Examiner and Coroner Offices, 2018*. NCJ 302051. https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/meco18.pdf

[4] Le AB, Brooks EG, McNulty LA, et al. U.S. Medical Examiner/Coroner capability to handle highly infectious decedents. *Forensic Sci Med Pathol*. Mar 2019;15(1):31-40. doi:10.1007/s12024-018-0043-2

[5] American Medical Association. Overdose Epidemic Report. 2023. www.ama-assn.org/system/files/ama-overdose-epidemic-report.pdf

[6] www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/nchs_press_releases/2021/202110.htm

[7] Naomi F. Sugie *et al.* Excess mortality in U.S. Prisons during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sci. Adv. 9, eadj8104 (2023) DOI:10.1126/sciadv.adj8104

[8] https://www.kptv.com/2023/05/11/bodies-stacking-up-autopsies-nixed-oregon-medical-examiners-division-facing-worsening-crisis/

[9] https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/maryland/audit-marylands-medical-examiners-office-cites-history-of-chronic-understaffing/65-9f300944-25f0-4e0d-b160-820544f8ca72

The 2023 CMEC is necessary to gain an updated understanding of the national extent of the local and state issues mentioned above, how MEC offices have changed since 2018, and to obtain a better picture of the infrastructure underlying the U.S. MDI system.

2. Indicate how, by whom, and for what purpose the information is to be used. Except for a new collection, indicate the actual use the agency has made of the information received from the current collection.

BJS Uses

Since 2002, BJS has conducted the Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories (CPFFCL; OMB #1121-0269), which complements the CMEC as both MEC offices and forensic crime laboratories serve as primary support agencies to law enforcement agencies and their operations. The CMEC is the only national source of personnel, resources, workloads, policies, and practices across MEC offices. Through the 2018 CMEC, which achieved an 81% response rate, BJS documented the number of MEC offices conducting MDI in the United States and provided key statistics regarding their operations, infrastructure, and resources. BJS's reports Medical Examiners and Coroners' Offices, 2004 and Medical Examiner and Coroner Offices, 2018 remain the only comprehensive source of administrative data on how MDI systems vary widely across jurisdiction size, caseload, staffing, procedures performed, record retention, use of national databases, and budgets.

Based on the 2018 CMEC, BJS filled key information gaps related to the national death caseload, including tribal lands cases; MEC office accreditation status; certification status of investigative staff; expanded and refined office functions and responsibilities (e.g., next of kin communications); autopsy and toxicology outsourcing costs, policies, and practices; the number of unidentified human remains in the custody of each office; access to key investigative resources; expenses; and specialized investigation teams.

BJS will use the 2023 CMEC data to gain an enhanced understanding of the national caseload of deaths that require medicolegal death investigations, as well as the staffing, infrastructure, and resources that are available to process these cases. The 2023 CMEC will document the status of the MEC offices' case management and laboratory information management systems, which have been slower to transition to automated systems compared to forensic crime laboratories.

The key measures of the 2023 CMEC that BJS uses to achieve its mission include:

- Staffing, which are salient given the national pipeline shortage of forensic pathologists and medicolegal death investigators;
- Policies and procedures;
- Budget and resources; and
- Caseload, including the number of unidentified human remains on record and autopsies performed.

Uses of the CMEC by others

BJS makes available to the public the CMEC data and documentation at the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD). From April 2021 to April 2024, the documentation or data were downloaded 502 times across 158 unique users. Because MEC offices are situated at the crossroads of public health and safety, CMEC data are highly relevant to the work of law enforcement practitioners, the professional research community, and public health agencies, as the collection provides official statistics on the staffing, budget, resources, and infrastructure in place to investigate questioned deaths.

Examples of users and uses of these data include—

Federal, state, and local agencies -- for comparative statistical purposes and benchmarks for funding and resources, such as the average operating budget for MEC offices by jurisdiction size. CMEC data are included in multiple government reports, presentations, and publications including:

- Dr. Joyce DeJong, Chief Medical Examiner for several counties in Michigan and President of the National Association of Medical Examiner (NAME), referenced staffing data from the 2018 CMEC in presentations on the forensic pathologist workforce shortage at both the 2023 International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME) training symposium and NAME annual meeting.
- A June 2023 article posted on the Federation of American Scientists webpage[10] provided CMEC statistics from 2018 to highlight that only 43% of MEC offices have computerized case management system to track deaths and work completed and that only 80% of agencies have access to the internet outside of their personal devices. In addition, the article highlights the resources and infrastructure in place to perform their work.
- Coroner Bobbi Jo O'Neal from Charleston County, SC gave a presentation to the NIJ/CDC funded MDI Data Workgroup that included a slide with data from the 2018 CMEC. She also has used the data in testifying before her state legislators.[11]
- The 2019 NIJ Report to Congress: Needs Assessment of Forensic Laboratories and Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices referenced the CMEC six times regarding the 2004 CMEC data related to the number of offices in operation, staffing, and caseload.[12]
- An April 2018 NIJ journal article focused on NamUs and referenced the CMEC's findings regarding the 4,400 unidentified decedents in 2004. Moreover, the 4,400 estimate is also an unattributed reference on the NamUs main webpage.[13]
- Dr. Michael Murphy, former Coroner for the Clark County Coroner's Office, NV and past president of the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners, used the map from the BJS report "Medical Examiners and Coroners' Offices, 2004" to show the U.S. states by type of MEC system during his presentation at the 2018 International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME) training symposium in Las Vegas, NV in July 2018.

[10] https://fas.org/publication/lets-talk-about-death-the-state-of-medicolegal-death-investigations/
[11] https://www.sccounties.org/friday-reports/friday-report-april-21-2023
[12] https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/253626.pdf
[13] https://www.namus.gov/

- Dr. Andrew Baker, former National Association of Medical Examiners president and Chief Medical Examiner of Hennepin County, MN, referenced the CMEC 2004 data to highlight caseload and workforce numbers in his keynote address at the 2018 Society of Forensic Toxicologists in Minneapolis, MN in October 2018.

In addition, information collected by the CMEC concerning caseload, staffing, and certification of medicolegal death investigators and accreditation of MEC offices nationwide, will inform the national need for forensic pathologists and supporting staff, as well as support and inform national efforts currently underway by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to provide funding that will facilitate MEC offices to achieve higher success through its Strengthening the Medical Examiner-Coroner System Program (see https://bja.ojp.gov/program/strengthening-mec/overview). The 2023 CMEC will also provide needed data to inform the development of current and future Department of Justice funding programs. For example, the BJA Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program aims to improve the quality and timeliness of forensic science and MEC services by providing funds to implement new technologies, train forensic pathologists, and help eliminate backlogs. Having updated data will help inform BJA about the most efficient areas to target its grant funding.

The Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs and the Department of Health and Human Services formed the Medicolegal Death Investigation Federal Interagency Working Group (MDI-WG; see https://ojp.gov/resources/ojp-hhs-mdi-wg.htm) in March 2018 to coordinate federal initiatives to strengthen the MDI system and support death investigation services practiced by MEC offices across the United States. The 2023 CMEC will support this effort by providing data that will speak to many key areas and provide relevant data to inform the working group of appropriate next steps in terms of budgets, planning, needs, and areas for program growth and outreach. In addition to the key measures identified in Section 5, the consulted MEC experts considered the following as key measures for their community:

- Number and types of MEC offices, including Texas JPs;
- Number of full-time and part-time personnel and their responsibilities and roles;
- Average total operating budgets and personal resources used for MEC office operational needs;
- Caseloads and autopsies performed and outsourced; and
- Policies and procedures regarding autopsies and MDI.

Academia and Independent Researchers – To conduct research on a range of criminal justice topics. Below is a sample of publications using data from the CMEC in the last four years.

- Mitchell, R. & Aronson, J. (2023). *Death in Custody: How America Ignores the Truth and What We Can Do about It*. John Hopkins University Press.
- Ascolese, M., Keyes, K., Ropero-Miller, J., Wire, S., & Smiley-McDonald, H. (2024) Mass fatality and disaster response preparedness across medical examiner and coroner offices in the United States. *Forensic Science International: Synergy, 8,* 100462. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsisyn.2024.100462.
- Weinstein, L.C. Keyes, K.A., Brooks, C., Ascolese, M.A., Smiley-McDonald, H.M., Ropero-Miller, J.D. (2024) Technology use among the nation's medical examiner and coroner offices: Data from the 2018 Census of Medical Examiner and Coroner Offices. Forensic Science International: Synergy, 8, 100477, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsisyn.2024.100477.
- Smiley-McDonald, H., Keyes, K.A., Wire, S., Greenwell, K., Santos, N.A., & Ropero-Miller, J.D. (2024). The impacts of governing agency: A comparison of resources in the patchwork of medicolegal death investigation systems. *Forensic Science International: Synergy*, 8, 100467. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsisyn.2024.100467.
- Ropero-Miller, J.D., Pitts, W.J., Imran, A., Bell, R.A., & Smiley-McDonald, H.M. (2024). Medicolegal death investigations on tribal lands—underrepresented or underserved? *Forensic Science International: Synergy, 8,* 100480. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsisyn.2024.100480.
- Rodriguez, A. L., Smiley-McDonald, H. M., Cummings, M. S., Wire, S., Slack, D., Williams, C. L., Keyes, K. A., & Ropero-Miller, J. D. (2022). Understanding unidentified human remains investigations through the United States census data. *Forensic Science International: Synergy*, 4, 100225. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fsisyn.2022.100225
- Ropero-Miller, J. D., Smiley-McDonald, H. M., Zimmer, S. A., & Bollinger, K. M. (2020). A Census of medicolegal death investigation in the United States: A need to determine the state of our nation's toxicology laboratories and their preparedness for the *current drug overdose epidemic. Journal of Forensic Sciences, 65(2), 544-549.*

3. Describe whether, and to what extent, the collection of information involves the use of automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques or other forms of information technology, e.g., permitting electronic submission of responses, and the basis for the decision for adopting this means of collection. Also, describe any consideration of using information technology to reduce burden.

The 2023 CMEC will use a multi-mode design in which respondents are directed to a web survey through mailed and emailed invitations. The web survey will be hosted by BJS's data collection agent RTI International (RTI) and will be available at www.bjscmec.rti.org.

The 2023 CMEC instrument has been designed for online data collection by RTI's web programming team using the same software from the 2018 CMEC. The survey software will allow RTI to keep an updated database of contact information for agencies, which will further allow the team to send emails to respondents explaining the purpose of the CMEC and a hyperlink to the questionnaire. Each respondent will have a unique Case Identification Number and password provided by RTI to access the website to complete the census form. The web

survey application will include data validation and logic checks to help ensure responses are consistent, within range, and follow proper skip patterns as necessary. If a respondent provides an answer that is out-of-range or inconsistent with answers elsewhere in the survey, they will be prompted to verify their answers as accurate. These processes will help improve data quality and minimize respondent burden by reducing the need for extensive data verification follow-up contact. Respondents will be able to start the survey, break off, and resume the survey from where they left off with answers saved. At any point during the process, respondents will have the ability to print a copy of the questions through a PDF format so they can have a "working copy" to share with others to help gather data. Respondents will be able to respond to the survey using mobile devices, such as tablets. The software allows for real-time online tracking of respondents thereby allowing BJS to track the completion of each office's responses. The survey software supports the export of data and paradata as specified by BJS.

Agencies may have several reasons why they do not respond via the internet; for example, some might not have reliable internet access, and others might find it difficult to complete the CMEC online because of the complexity of the requested data or the need to involve multiple people in preparing the response. About 27% of the 2018 CMEC respondents completed the paper version of the questionnaire. Agencies will receive a paper version of the 2023 CMEC questionnaire upon request. Furthermore, a paper copy of the questionnaire will be mailed in a reminder mailing to nonresponders. In addition, agencies will be able to download a PDF version of the survey from the CMEC website that can be printed or e-mailed to their staff. Respondents can also complete the survey in paper format and transcribe it into the online survey instrument, or scan and return the completed form via email, or return the completed form via mail.

4. Describe efforts to identify duplication. Show specifically why any similar information already available cannot be used or modified for use for the purposes described in Item A.2 above.

After reviewing other BJS surveys, federal data collections, and relevant academic literature, BJS finds that the CMEC provides information that is not duplicated by other federal or non-federal data collections. This CMEC is the only agency-level survey that gathers national data on the infrastructure and operations of the MDI system. Other federal agencies that collect data from MEC offices are focused on the deaths themselves rather than the work of the MEC offices. Examples of these collections include the CDC's National Violent Death Reporting System, the National Vital Statistics System, the Enhanced State Opioid Overdose Surveillance, and the Sudden Death in the Young Case Registry as well as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Fatality Analysis Reporting System.

BJS's other data collection concerning forensic science, the CPFFCL (OMB #1121-0269), was last fielded in 2020 and included 14 MEC offices. CMEC and CPFFCL are designed to complement each other. In certain jurisdictions, an MEC office may be within a forensic crime laboratory, or conversely, a crime laboratory may be located within an MEC office. The CMEC will specify that we are interested only in information related to the MDI portion of the office and in those personnel who are assigned to MDI-related roles and duties. The CPFFCL asks questions relevant to a broader array of forensic sciences, while the CMEC asks questions related

specifically to MDI personnel, policies, and practices. BJS plans to field the next CPFFCL in 2025.

Another survey that collects information from similar agencies is BJS's Census of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies (CSLLEA; OMB #1121-0346) which includes sheriffs' offices. Some of these offices, notably in California, are also coroner offices. In the 2004 CMEC, 44 offices, largely concentrated in California, were sheriff-coroner offices. While there is a small overlap in the offices included in both studies, the questions asked in the CMEC are different from CSLLEA. The CSLLEA includes items on the number and sex of law enforcement officers employed by law enforcement agencies, and duties performed by the officers. The CSLLEA launched in September 2022 and data collection was completed in 2023.

The only survey identified that includes a small set of overlapping data collection items is the Drug Enforcement Administration's National Forensic Laboratory Information System (NFLIS) Medical Examiner/Coroner Office (MEC) survey, which was primarily focused on obtaining toxicology-related policies and requesting practices from MEC offices nationwide in 2022. The 6-month 2023 NFLIS MEC survey data collection yielded a 78% response rate for complete surveys. BJS identified four potential areas of overlap between CMEC and NFLIS:

- Type of office – NFLIS asked respondents to indicate the type of office in which they work (State medical examiner, district/regional medical examiner, etc.). CMEC, on the other hand, asks two questions: 1) what best describes the death investigation office (coroner or medical examiner) and 2) what level of government best describes the office (city, county, district, state). Although both data collections ask about the type of office, it is a very low burden for offices to answer, and it is crucial to identify the type of office surveyed. Asking this question consistently will allow for analysis of any changes in the type of office operating and provide important context for the office's data (e.g., caseload).

- Jurisdiction(s) served – Both CMEC and NFLIS ask respondents to identify (via an open text field) which jurisdictions they serve (e.g., Illinois, Los Angeles County, New York City, First Judicial District). While NFLIS also asked respondents to identify the size of the population they serve, CMEC does not. BJS needs to collect this information to link population size estimates to the office based on what jurisdictions it serves. It is also important to obtain an up-to-date understanding of jurisdictions served because this may change over time. Most coroners are elected officials. In counties in which the coroner's elected position is unfilled, it is common to outsource coroner responsibilities to a neighboring jurisdiction. Keeping this information updated is necessary to link the population served to reasons for potential increases or decreases in caseload and budget.

- Caseload – Both CMEC and NFLIS ask about the number of cases (deaths) referred to offices, accepted by offices, and autopsies performed by offices. CMEC also asks how many referred and accepted cases came from tribal lands. While both collections may collect the same data point, it is necessary that CMEC ask this to be able to understand the context in which cases from tribal lands are referred to and accepted by MEC offices.

- Use of computerized management system – NFLIS focused on the office's use of laboratory information management systems (LIMS) with probing questions on data fields, file types, and specific software used for the information management system. CMEC asks more broadly whether offices have a computerized management system (CMS) beyond spreadsheet software (e.g., Excel) and whether the CMS is networked so that it is available to all authorized users.

The most recent NFLIS-MEC survey had a reference year of 2021. CMEC will use a reference year of 2023. The answers to most of these questions, especially those of caseload and use of computerized management systems, may have changed in the intervening years. Collecting this information with a different reference year affords BJS and others the ability to analyze more current data.

Efforts to Minimize Burden

The 2023 CMEC was designed to minimize response burden in several ways. First, based on feedback received from the agencies through an expert panel and cognitive interviews, the new instrument features questions that have been refined to increase clarity and improve response options where needed. Second, the 2023 CMEC was developed for a web-based data collection and includes filter questions, built-in skip patterns, and data checks. Although the number of questions has increased from 63 items to 75 items between the 2018 and 2023 instruments, the number of data points that are being collected has decreased from 172 to 135, reflecting streamlined response categories and the reduction of multi-part questions. In addition, the number of skip patterns has increased between the 2018 and 2023 instruments, thereby further reducing the burden from 2018 to 2023 for some respondents. The 2023 CMEC was also designed with best practice web layouts including matrices where appropriate. In addition, it was designed to have more yes/no questions to obtain information about access to resources based on expert panel feedback that suggested dire basic needs within the community.

For the 2023 CMEC, BJS consulted with an expert panel that was composed of medical examiners and coroners from various states and sized agencies. BJS incorporated feedback from this panel and cognitively tested a revised version of the instrument with 31 respondents (14 coroners, 14 medical examiners, and 3 justices of the peace) under BJS's generic clearance (OMB # 1121-0339). The resulting instrument represents a thorough redesign. See **Attachment 3** for the complete cognitive testing report, including the protocol for testing the instrument; all referenced question numbers refer to the tested instrument and may not be the same in the final instrument due to the redesign.

BJS expects that many respondents will complete the survey online, thus, web-based system functions will be in place to ease the burden of survey completion. RTI uses an intelligent log-in program for data collection, which will store MEC office information and responses, allowing for multi-session completion of the survey instrument. Since many offices, particularly the larger ones, will need to seek multiple information sources within their organizations to answer different sections, this will reduce burden by facilitating data entry from different sources. It will

also reduce burden by allowing respondents to pause in completing the survey pending confirmation of information from others in the office.

Since some respondents will complete the CMEC using paper forms, survey methodologists have evaluated the questions and layout to ensure that the instrument is formatted appropriately for what is being asked of respondents. This includes ensuring that instructions and questions are clear, adjacent to one another, and definitions for terms are provided as necessary and placed near the question to which they refer. This evaluation, along with feedback from expert panelists and cognitive interview participants, has helped refine the current survey instrument.

RTI will also provide assistance by phone and email. A toll-free help line will be established, and staff will be available during regular business hours. When staff are not available, calls will be routed to voicemail. Messages will be responded to within 24 hours. A dedicated CMEC help email address will be provided with all written materials and emails. Phone numbers and email addresses will be provided to respondents to ensure timely communications.

5. If the collection of information impacts small businesses or other small entities, describe any methods used to minimize burden.

The CMEC data collection may indirectly involve small offices that may jointly serve a role as an MEC office. BJS continues to use web-based data collection instruments to ease reporting and reduce the need for follow-up due to errors in reporting and incorrect skips caught by programmatic edit checks. Questions on the CMEC instrument have been streamlined such that most responses allow respondents to select from a list of options without needing to provide narratives or consult raw data pulls. Additionally, cognitive testing participants included representatives from small jurisdictions who provided feedback that was used to further reduce burden. This is intended to allow for easier response burden as it avoids extensive data requests or entry. For small agencies that may not be able to submit electronically, the CMEC will also be available via paper and phone.

6. Describe the consequence to federal program or policy activities if the collection is not conducted or is conducted less frequently, as well as any technical or legal obstacles to reducing burden.

Should the 2023 CMEC not be fielded, the 2018 data will remain the most comprehensive information about the MDI system. These data are dated and provide little insight into how the MDI infrastructure has changed or evolved given two major national health crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing opioid epidemic, set against the national forensic staffing pipeline shortage. Moreover, federal programs aimed to support the MDI system through a funding stream, such as BJA's Strengthening the Medical Examiner-Coroner System Program, will continue to base some of the funding and programmatic needs on these old, outdated data.

BJS understands from the leadership from the National Association of Medical Examiners, International Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners, and the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators that there is great interest and continued support of the CMEC to update national understanding of the state of the MDI system. BJS plans to field the CPFFCL

in 2025 with a reference date of 2024. Keeping these collections on this schedule will allow BJS and others to examine trends in the fields of forensic sciences more broadly.

7. Explain any special circumstances that would cause an information collection to be conducted in a manner:

- **requiring respondents to report information to the agency more often than quarterly;**
- **requiring respondents to prepare a written response to a collection of information in fewer than 30 days after receipt of it;**
- **requiring respondents to submit more than an original and two copies of any document;**
- **requiring respondents to retain records, other than health, medical, government contract, grant-in-aid, or tax records for more than three years;**
- **in connection with a statistical survey, that is not designed to produce valid and reliable results that can be generalized to the universe of study;**
- **requiring the use of statistical data classification that has not been reviewed and approved by OMB;**
- **that includes a pledge of confidentially that is not supported by authority established in statute or regulation, that is not supported by disclosure and data security policies that are consistent with the pledge, or which unnecessarily impedes sharing of data with other agencies for compatible confidential use; or**
- **requiring respondents to submit proprietary trade secret, or other confidential information unless the agency can demonstrate that it has instituted procedures to protect the information's confidentially to the extent permitted by law.**

There are no special circumstances.

8. If applicable, provide a copy and identify the date and page number of publication in the *Federal Register* of the agency's notice, required by 5 CFR 1320.8(d), soliciting comments on the information collection prior to submission to OMB. Summarize public comments received in response to that notice and describe actions taken by the agency in response to these comments. Specifically address comments received on cost and hour burden.

- **Describe efforts to consult with persons outside the agency to obtain their views on the availability of data, frequency of collection, the clarity of instructions and recordkeeping, disclosure, or reporting format (if any), and on the data elements to be recorded, disclosed, or reported.**
- **Consultation with representatives of those from whom information is to be obtained or those who must compile records should occur at least once every 3 years -- even if the collection-of-information activity is the same as in prior periods. There may be circumstances that may preclude consultation in a specific situation. These circumstances should be explained**

The research under this clearance is consistent with the guidelines in 5 CFR 1320.8(d). The 60-day notice for public commentary was published in the Federal Register, Volume 89, Number 99, pages 44712-44713 on May 21, 2024 (**Attachment 4**). BJS advertised this notice on its webpage and social media feeds. The comment period ended on July 22, 2024. In response to the 60-day notice, BJS received and responded to one set of comments from a coroner with a non-profit organization (**Attachment 4**). The 30-day notice for public commentary was published in the federal register following the expiration of the 60-day comment period (**Attachment 5**).

An expert panel of practitioners was gathered to assess the instrument used for the 2023 CMEC. These panelists included practitioners from both medical examiner and coroner offices. Panelists were provided with the survey instrument and materials from BJS and RTI introducing the project and BJS's goals in conducting the census. Panelists were asked to assess the survey form for clarity of the questions, relevance of the questions to the field, and to provide updates from the field that ought to be included in the form. BJS, RTI, and the expert panelists gathered for a two-day meeting during March of 2023 to discuss the census form item-by-item. Feedback from this expert panel was used to inform instrument design for cognitive testing discussed above. Expert panelists are included in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Expert panelists for BJS meeting on the 2023 CMEC instrument

Name	Position	Organization
Kathy Pinneri	Director	Montgomery Forensic Science Center (Texas)
Ted Brown	Chief Medical Examiner	Arkansas State Crime Laboratory (Arkansas)
Shane Sheets	Director	Midwest Medical Examiner's Office (Minnesota)
Bobbi Jo O'Neal	Coroner	Charleston County Coroner's Office (South Carolina)
Jennifer Snippen	Board-Certified Medicolegal Death Investigator/Researcher	Oregon State University (Oregon)
Lina Evans	Coroner	Shelby County Coroner (Alabama)
David Lash	Deputy Coroner	Shelby County Coroner (Alabama)

The instrument was then cognitively tested. Thirty-one MEC offices across the country—distributed across small, large, state, and local agencies and representing coroner, medical examiner, and justice of the peace offices—were emailed a draft of the original and addendum/supplement instrument, and a time was set up to talk through the instrument with a cognitive interviewer (**Table 2**). Representatives were asked to comment on question wording, response categories and layout, and to identify any issues with recall or ability to complete the instrument. Results from cognitive interviewing were used to make final revisions to the instrument.

Table 2. Agencies participating in the 2023 CMEC cognitive interviews

Agency Type	Population Size	Agency Name	State
Coroner	2,230,000	Clark County Coroner	NV
Coroner	131,749	Missouri River Coroner	ND
Coroner	44,291	Douglas County Coroner	WA
Coroner	23,060	Crawford County Coroner	MO

Coroner	129,523	Skagit County Coroner	WA
Coroner	20,948	Fairfield County Coroner	SC
Coroner	17,400	Park County Coroner	CO
Coroner	53,500	Fulton County Coroner	NY
Coroner	375,000	Lehigh County Coroner	PA
Coroner	16,500	Madison County Coroner	ID
Coroner	61,700	Garfield County Coroner	CO
Coroner	764,000	San Mateo County, Office of the Coroner	CA
Coroner	53,500	Coffee County Coroner	AL
Coroner	495,000	Ada County Coroner Office	ID
Medical Examiner	106,480	Walworth County Medical Examiner's Office	WI
Medical Examiner	477,000	Onondaga County Office Medical Examiner's Office	NY
Medical Examiner	13,130	Cass County Medical Examiner	IA
Medical Examiner	1,940,000	Santa Clara County Medical Examiner-Coroner Office	CA
Medical Examiner	52,600	Medical Examiner's Division, Columbia County	OR
Medical Examiner	607,000	District 1 Medical Examiner' Office (FL)	FL
Medical Examiner	806,528	Mid Michigan Medical Examiner Group	MI
Medical Examiner	402,500	Office of the Regional Medical Examiner (Franklin, Jefferson, St Charles Counties)	MO
Medical Examiner	1,280,000	Hennepin County Medical Examiner's Office	MN
Medical Examiner	69,170	Regional ME, University of North Dakota (and Coroner for several South Dakota counties)	ND
Medical Examiner	4,240,000	Oregon State Police, Medical Examiner Division	OR
Medical Examiner	1,360,000	Office of Chief Medical Examiner for Maine	ME
Medical Examiner	733,000	State Medical Examiner Office for Alaska	AK
Medical Examiner	3,610,000	Office of the Chief Medical Examiner for Connecticut	CT
Justice of the Peace	44,800	Wood County, Precinct 2 Justice of the Peace	TX
Justice of the Peace	16,968	Falls County, Precinct 4 Justice of the Peace	TX
Justice of the Peace	47,300	Rockwall County, Precinct 3 Justice of the Peace	TX

9. Explain any decision to provide any payments or gifts to respondents, other than remuneration of contractors or grantees.

No government funds will be used as payment or for gifts to respondents. Participation is voluntary and no gifts or incentives will be given.

10. Describe any assurance of confidentiality provided to respondents and the basis for the assurance in statute, regulation, or agency policy.

BJS, its employees, and its data collection agents will use the data it collects only for statistical or research purposes, consistent with 34 U.S.C. § 10134, which states *"data collected by the Bureau shall be used only for statistical or research purposes, and shall be gathered in a manner that precludes their use for law enforcement or any purpose relating a private person or public agency other than statistical or research purposes."* BJS is required to protect information identifiable to a private person from unauthorized disclosure and may not publicly release data in

a way that could reasonably identify a specific private person, consistent with the confidentiality requirements in 34 U.S.C. § 10231 and 28 CFR Part 22.

The data collected through the 2023 CMEC represent institutional characteristics of MEC offices. Information collected from these organizations is considered within the public domain. The first page of the survey instrument will include information regarding how participation in this survey is voluntary and how information about individual agency responses will be available to the public after the conclusion of the survey. However, it will also be made clear to responding agencies that BJS and RTI will not archive or otherwise release the names, phone numbers, or email addresses of the actual persons responsible for completing the 2023 CMEC instrument.

11. Provide additional justification for any questions of a sensitive nature, such as sexual behavior and attitudes, religious beliefs, and other matters that are commonly considered private. This justification should include the reasons why the agency considers the questions necessary, the specific uses to be made of the information, the explanation to be given to persons from whom the information is requested, and any steps to be taken to obtain their consent.

There are no questions of a sensitive nature in the proposed 2023 CMEC.

12. Provide estimates of the hour burden of the collection of information. The statement should:

- **Indicate the number of respondents, frequency of response, annual hour burden, and an explanation of how the burden was estimated. Unless directed to do so, agencies should not conduct special surveys to obtain information on which to base hour burden estimates. Consultation with a sample (fewer than 10) of potential respondents is desirable. If the hour burden on respondents is expected to vary widely because of differences in activity, size, or complexity, show the range of estimated hour burden, and explain the reasons for the variance. General, estimates should not include burden hours for customary and usual business practices.**
- **If this request for approval covers more than one form, provide separate hour burden estimates for each form.**
- **Provide estimates of annualized cost to respondents for the hour burdens for collections of information, identifying and using appropriate wage rate categories. The cost of contracting out or paying outside parties for information collection activities should not be included here. Instead, this cost should be included in Item 14.**

Approximately 3,000 agencies will be invited to participate in the 2023 CMEC, including about 2,300 MEC offices nationwide, and 700 justices of the peace offices in Texas that were not part of the previous CMECs. BJS has estimated the respondent burden for the 2023 CMEC at 4,875 hours (**Table 3**). The 2023 CMEC burden estimate was calculated using an estimate of 90 minutes (or 1.5 hours) per respondent for the completion of the 75-question questionnaire being completed by an estimated 3,000 offices. In addition, BJS plans to conduct data quality follow-

up with approximately 1,500 offices at 15 minutes (or .25 hours) per respondent, totaling 375 hours.

The 90-minute estimate is based on feedback received during the 2018 CMEC, the input of the 2018 and 2023 expert panels, and estimates provided during cognitive testing for the 2023 CMEC. This includes the time needed by responding agencies to research the information being requested on the form.

Table 3. Summary of annual burden hours associated with the 2023 CMEC

Collection	Number of Respondents	Freq.	Total Annualized Responses	Participation Time (minutes)	Total Burden (Hours)	Hourly Rate	Monetized Value of Respondent Time
All MEC offices	2,300	1	2,300	90	3,450	$35.67	$123,062
Justice of the peace offices in Texas	700	1	700	90	1,050	$35.67	$37,453
Data Quality Follow-Up	1,500	1	1,500	15	375	$35.67	$13,376
Total	**3,000**		**3,000**		**4,875**		**$173,891**

Assuming a pay rate approximately equivalent to the GS-12 / 01 level ($74,441 per year), the estimated agency cost of employee time would be approximately $35.67 per hour. Based on the estimated time burden of 90 minutes (or 1.5 hours) per response and employee pay rate, the total respondent employee time cost burden to complete the census form is estimated at $160,515. Additionally, BJS estimates that for about half (or 1,500) of the 2023 CMEC responses, we will conduct data quality follow up, taking approximately 15 minutes (or .25 hours) to complete. The additional estimated respondent employee cost burden for the 375 data quality follow-up hours is $13,376. There are no anticipated costs to respondents beyond the employee time needed to complete the survey and participate in data quality follow up. Therefore, the total cost burden to respondents associated with this clearance request is $173,891.

13. Provide an estimate of the total annual cost burden to respondents or recordkeepers resulting from the collection of information. (Do not include the cost of any hour burden shown in Items 12 and 14).

- **The cost estimate should be split into two components: (a) a total capital and start up cost component (annualized over its expected useful life); and (b) a total operation and maintenance and purchase of service component. The estimates should take into account costs associated with generating, maintaining, and disclosing or providing the information. Include descriptions of methods used to estimate major cost factors including system and technology acquisition, expected useful life of capital equipment, the discount rate(s), and the time period over which costs will be incurred. Capital and start-up costs include, among other items,**

preparations for collecting information such as purchasing computers and software; monitoring, sampling, drilling and testing equipment; and record storage facilities.

- **If cost estimates are expected to vary widely, agencies should present ranges of cost burdens and explain the reasons for the variance. The cost of purchasing or contracting out information collection services should be a part of this cost burden estimate. In developing cost burden estimates, agencies may consult with a sample of respondents (fewer than 10), utilize the 60-day pre-OMB submission public comment process and use existing economic or regulatory impact analysis associated with the rulemaking containing the information collection, as appropriate.**
- **Generally, estimates should not include purchases of equipment or services, or portions thereof, made: (1) prior to October 1, 1995, (2) to achieve regulatory compliance with requirements not associated with the information collection, (3) for reasons other than to provide information or keep records for the government, or (4) as part of customary and usual business or private practices.**

There are no anticipated costs to respondents beyond the employee time expended in gathering advance information or completing the instrument. Respondents are not being asked to purchase anything or maintain any services as part of this data collection. Furthermore, purchase of outside accounting or information collection services, if performed by the respondent, is part of usual and customary business practices, not specifically required for providing information to BJS.

14. Provide estimates of the annualized cost to the Federal Government. Also, provide a description of the method used to estimate cost, which should include quantification of hours, operational expenses (such as equipment, overhead, printing, and support staff), any other expense that would not have been incurred without this collection of information. Agencies also may aggregate cost estimates from Items 12, 13, and 14 into a single table.

The total expected cost to the Federal government for the 2023 CMEC is $1,296,618. BJS personnel costs are calculated based on the Office of Personnel Management's 2023 and 2024 salary tables. This work consists of planning the project, developing the questionnaire, preparing the materials, collecting the data, evaluating the results, generating the data reports, and responding to media and external inquiries. A BJS GS-14 Statistician will oversee RTI's work on this project. Table 4 shows the estimated project budget for the 2023 CMEC.

Table 4. Estimated Costs for the 2023 CMEC

	Project Year			
	2023	2024	2025	**Total**
BJS cost				
Staff salaries				
GS-14 Statistician (25%)	$33,092	$34,849	$35,894	$103,835
GS-15 Supervisory Statistician (5%)	$7,785	$8,198	$8,444	$24,427
GS-14 Lead Editor (5%)	$6,618	$6,970	$7,179	$20,767
GS-13 Other Editorial Staff (3%)	$3,360	$3,539	$3,645	$10,544
GS-14 Information Technology Specialist (5%)	$6,618	$6,970	$7,179	$20,767

GS-15/SES/SL BJS leadership (1%)	$5,799	$6,078	$6,260	$18,137
Subtotal salaries	$63,273	$66,603	$68,601	$198,477
Fringe benefits (30% of salaries)	$18,982	$19,981	$20,580	$59,543
Subtotal: Salary & fringe	*$82,255*	*$86,584*	*$89,181*	$258,020
Other administrative costs of salary & fringe (15%)	$12,338	$12,988	$13,377	$38,703
Subtotal: BJS cost	***$94,594***	***$99,571***	***$102,559***	***$296,723***
Data collection agent cost				
Personnel	$124,912	$120,104	$96,978	$341,994
Fringe Benefits	$54,961	$52,846	$42,670	$150,478
Travel	$6,670	$0	$0	$6,670
Equipment	$0	$0	$0	$0
Supplies	$0	$11,033	$987	$12,020
Consultants/Contracts	$0	$41,789	$8,068	$49,857
Other	$1,209	$19,869	$8,024	$29,102
Total Direct Costs	*$187,752*	*$245,641*	*$156,727*	*$590,121*
Total Indirect	$148,560	$145,564	$115,650	$409,774
Subtotal data collection agent cost	***$336,313***	***$391,205***	***$272,377***	***$999,895***
Sum of BJS and agent cost	**$430,906**	**$490,776**	**$374,936**	**$1,296,618**

15. Explain the reasons for any program changes or adjustments.

No change in burden is expected to individual respondents for the 2023 CMEC relative to that of the 2018 CMEC. The burden estimate for the 2018 CMEC was 90 minutes, and we estimate the 2023 CMEC burden to also be 90 minutes. However, to provide more comprehensive statistics on the nation's MDI work outside of the traditional MEC offices, the 2023 CMEC will include the approximately 700 justices of the peace in Texas that make cause and manner of death determinations but were out of scope for the 2004 and 2018 CMECs.

The 2023 CMEC will allow for needed comparisons with the 2004 and 2018 CMEC, but the proposed instrument (**Attachment 1**) has been revised to include modifications to some previous items and new items stemming from expert and methodological reviews as well as cognitive testing of the survey. BJS has evaluated all comments and recommendations for revision from cognitive testing and have incorporated these changes for improvement into the new CMEC instrument. The instrument has 75 items across 6 sections—

1. Section A – Administrative (A1–A24)
This section collects information on the type of office being surveyed (coroner, sheriff-coroner,

medical examiner, etc.), the level of government they represent, the type of agency or government body the office reports to, the geographic jurisdictions served (including whether they are a multi-jurisdictional office), whether the head of the office is required to be a forensic pathologist or physician and whether that person is full-time or part-time, the death investigation functions of the head of office, number of employees (full-time, part-time, contractors, and on-call employees), how autopsy services are handled by the office (whether the forensic pathologist or autopsy pathologist is directly employed by the office), salary/fee-structure details, and office vacancies. This information will be used to develop future CMECs and allows BJS to make comparisons between types of offices and to link the population of jurisdictions back to the office that serves them.

Cognitive testing resulted in changes to six items that encountered a similar issue with providing counts for contractors – these changes include the removal of a response row which include an answer choice with the fusion of a combined filter question and stem question to streamline staffing counts. Additional instructions were also included at the beginning of the series with slightly revised definitions for clarity. One item pertaining to "oversight", was found confusing due to different interpretations of the word; this item was reworded to include a clarifying term, received an additional response option, and was moved to Section B as it was now asking about "budgetary oversight". Two items received additional examples to clarify the question stem. One word was added to A6, to clarify "jurisdictions". Cognitive testing also resulted in the removal of four questions that either only pertained to a minority of offices (i.e., questions about forensic toxicologists on staff) or asked about data that could be obtained elsewhere (i.e., MEC accreditation status from two professional organizations). Four new questions were added to obtain more context for the "head of office" position (e.g., whether it is an elected position, specific functional roles, etc.). For Question A12, we excluded contracted forensic/autopsy pathologists because there were concerns about double-counting these staff. A13 and A18 are similar to the 2018 instrument but ask for a count rather than general answer. The count is a very important topic among employed forensic pathologists and medicolegal death investigators because their accreditation and national standards are based on having certifications. Because there are so many different pay structures and levels and hours of employment, A14 and A19 provide key additional context to salary structures, as well as providing insight into the diversity of systems.

2. Section B – Expenditures and Funds (B1–B5)

This section collects information on office budgets designated for death investigation functions, the type of agency that provides budgetary oversight of the office, the types of functions that are included in the total expenditures reported (e.g., autopsies, transportation, training, indigent burial, etc.), and the use of staff personal resources or out-of-pocket expenses (e.g., personal protective equipment and office supplies) where there was no reimbursement from the budget.

Section B had only one of the five questions presenting minor confusion to cognitive testing participants. For B3, two participants indicated that their office pays a portion of the expense, but not all of the expenditures for some of the functions covered in their budget. Thus, cognitive testing resulted in revising the "Yes" and "No" column headings to "All," "Some," and "None" to reduce confusion for offices that pay for some but not all of a given expense.

3. Section C – Workload (C1–C18)

This section collects information on the number of cases reported to offices, the number of cases the offices accepted and investigated in 2023, including whether cases were reported from tribal lands, the number of autopsies the office ordered or performed, whether procedures and functions are conducted within the office, sent to another medical examiner (e.g., state medical examiners) or contracted to an external agency, practices and policies around routinely ordered autopsies for particular types of deaths, the number of medicolegal death investigations performed in 2023, and next of kin responsibilities. Based on expert panel feedback, a question was added to determine the distance offices drive to obtain autopsies, as well as a question to understand the extent of how many offices had to handle a mass fatality even in 2023. Information from this section will allow BJS to describe the amount of work the offices undertook in 2023, and the infrastructure, policies, and procedures surrounding their labor.

The workload series generated some confusion amongst cognitive interview participants, which resulted in wording revisions for clarity, as well as the addition of illustrative examples for "additional death investigation functions" and additional instructions to help explain the "levels" of investigation being performed. Item C3 received some minor additional language for clarity around deaths "from" tribal lands, to include "that occurred on" tribal lands; the four questions about reported and accepted cases from tribal lands from the 2018 instrument were removed to reduce burden. Cognitive testing for items C13-C15 resulted in wording revision and providing examples to distinguish between "internal" and "external" autopsies. For Question C8, we added a question about the number of autopsies performed at private facilities given the preponderance of small MEC offices that must contract this service out to the private sector. In the absence of this question, this hidden workload would not be captured, but contributes to a sizable proportion of the national autopsy caseload.

4. Section D – Specialized Death Investigations (D1–D8)

This section collects information on the number of unidentified human remains in the offices, policies surrounding the remains, practices around overdose deaths, and procedures and policies concerning infant deaths. This information will allow BJS to produce an estimate of how many unidentified decedents were in the offices at the end of 2023. BJS will also be able to describe how many offices use the specific Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) diagnosis when completing a death certificate.

Generally, this section was well understood during cognitive testing, with only two questions requiring a clarification in definition or instructions. Question D1 introduced some confusion around the timeframe of cases, and questions about the terminology for "resolved cases" that were unidentified for 60 days or more. This question received clarifying instructions, similar to item D6 receiving a clarifying example for "delayed overdose deaths." Cognitive testing resulted in the removal of a question, which asked about the office's oldest case of unidentified remains currently on record, to reduce participant burden.

5. Section E – Records and Evidence Retention (E1–E8)

This section asks respondents about their ability to track cases, the use of computerized case management systems, policies for record retention, storage and archival of case records, information on the collection of sex, gender identity and race/ethnicity of decedents in records,

and office procedures for handling unclaimed remains. With varied office types, needs, and populations served, the offices have varying capacities for electronic case management. This section will allow BJS to summarize how and where offices store their records and evidence and how this has changed since 2018, which is important considering federal grants supporting basic infrastructure needs among this population. Several questions in this section were changed to include clarifying language within the instructions based on cognitive participant input and received a reference date for clarity.

6. Section F – Resources (F1–F11)

This section asks about what resources and technologies are available to the offices, whether directly through their office, through their relationship with an external office or agency, or not at all. It also asks about access to a work vehicle dedicated to death investigation functions, staff participation in various trainings, wellness support programs, multidisciplinary review teams, information about access to body storage coolers, and access to CAT, CT, and MRIs. Based on feedback from the expert panel, a new question was developed to ask about storage cooler capacity, and a separate question was created to ask about resources for the family of a decedent.

Several items were found to have minor issues during cognitive testing. Four questions received clarifying language, either in the form of examples or additional verbiage in the question. The example in item F7 was removed as a parenthetical and turned into a separate sentence for clarity. Certain resource questions received additional instructions to help clarify column headers.

16. For collections of information whose results will be published, outline plans for tabulations, and publication. Address any complex analytical techniques that will be used. Provide the time schedule for the entire project, including beginning and ending dates of the collection of information, completion of report, publication dates, and other actions.

For details on the project schedule, see Supporting Statement B.

Pending OMB approval, the 2023 CMEC data collection is scheduled to begin in September 2024. The data collection period (see **Table 5**) is scheduled to end in July 2025.

Table 5. 2023 CMEC project schedule

Task	Start Date	End Date
Data collection	September 2024	July 2025
Notification of impending due dates, nonresponse follow-up, thank you letters	September 2024	July 2025
Data editing, verification, final callbacks	September 2024	July 2025
Production of final analytic file and documentation	July 2025	October 2025
Analysis	October 2025	December 2025

Report writing, editing, and release	December 2025	June 2026

The dataset and supporting documentation will be made available for download without charge at the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD). Around the same date as the archiving of the data, BJS plans to release at least one report presenting findings from data gathered from this collection. Access to these data permits analysts to identify the specific responses of individual offices and to conduct statistical analyses.

17. If seeking approval to not display the expiration date for OMB approval of the information collection, explain the reasons that display would be inappropriate.

We are requesting no exemption.

18. Explain each exception to the certification statement.

This collection of information does not include any exceptions to the certificate statement.

B. COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATON EMPLOYING STATISTICAL METHODS.

This collection contains statistical data.

List of Attachments

Attachment 1: CMEC survey and screenshots of web instrument
Attachment 2: BJS authorizing legislation
Attachment 3: Cognitive interview report
Attachment 4: 60-day federal register notice, public comment and response
Attachment 5: 30-day federal register notice
Attachment 6: Survey invitation letters for MEC offices and Texas justices of the peace
Attachment 7: Endorsement letter
Attachment 8: Survey email invitation and CMEC flyer
Attachment 9: First reminder letter
Attachment 10: Second reminder email
Attachment 11: Third reminder postcard
Attachment 12: Fourth reminder letter
Attachment 13: Fifth reminder email
Attachment 14: Sixth reminder email
Attachment 15: Seventh reminder letter
Attachment 16: Eighth reminder letter
Attachment 17: Ninth reminder email
Attachment 18: Telephone follow-up scripts for data quality
Attachment 19: Telephone follow-up scripts for nonresponse
Attachment 20: Critical items list
Attachment 21: Critical items survey letter
Attachment 22: Critical items email
Attachment 23: End-of-study letter
Attachment 24: End-of-study email

Attachment 25: Completion thank you email