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news

Colorado Judicial Branch
Mary J. Mullarkey, Chief Justice
Gerald Marroney, State Court Administrator

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Contact: Jon Sarché

303-837-3644

303-210-6682

jon.sarche@judicial.state.co.us

Colorado court-security grants program launched *First award to improve courthouse security approved for Lincoln County*

DENVER – A new state commission set up to distribute grants to help Colorado communities ensure the safety of the public and of employees in their courthouses has awarded its first grant. The \$32,258 award to Lincoln County will help Sheriff Thomas Nestor hire temporary staff and buy equipment to further secure the courthouse in Hugo during high-profile trials this spring.

“We’re a smaller jurisdiction with a lot of bigger trials going on right now. We’re short of manpower and short of equipment. This funding that’s provided by the state is a very good thing, especially for rural counties like this,” Nestor said. “I think it’s a great program and I think it’s going to assist numerous counties, not only Lincoln County, to deal with the bigger problems that are starting to happen in rural counties.”

The Lincoln County grant was approved as an emergency request by a seven-member commission established under Senate Bill 07-118, sponsored by Sen. Brandon Shaffer, D-Boulder, and Rep. Steve King, R-Grand Junction, and signed into law by Gov. Bill Ritter. The first round of non-emergency awards is expected to be announced in mid-April. In the first round of grants, nearly \$1 million will be distributed based on joint requests by county commissioners, sheriffs and court officials across Colorado.

“We in the 18th Judicial District appreciate the commission’s quick response to our grant application, which we believe demonstrated a pressing need to supplement existing security precautions at the Hugo courthouse,” said 18th Judicial District Chief Judge William Sylvester. “It’s still in its early stages, but the program is working just as the General Assembly envisioned.”

The program is funded by surcharges on a variety of court fees that went into effect July 1, 2008. A second round of grants will be awarded in September 2008, with additional awards to be distributed once in each of the following nine years. The legislation calls for the General Assembly to review the program in 2017 to decide whether to continue the grants.

“Under Colorado law, courthouse construction, security and maintenance are counties’ responsibilities, and their budgets sometimes need a boost to ensure the safety of the public as well as judges and other courthouse employees,” said State Court Administrator Gerald Marroney. “The Court Security Fund grant program will provide supplementary funding for counties to hire additional security personnel, buy security-related equipment or provide additional training.”

The application period for the first round of grants will close Feb. 29, 2008. Grant funding is divided into three categories: \$699,000 for priority counties, as defined in the legislation; \$175,000 for non-priority counties; and \$125,000 to offset emergency spending for high-risk or high-profile trials.

Priority counties are those that meet at least two of the following criteria: population below the state median; per-capita income below the state median; property tax revenues below the state median; or total population living below the federal poverty level is greater than the state median. The median figures for each of the criteria are to be determined either by the Colorado Department of Local Affairs or the United States Census Bureau.

Grant applications must be signed by a chief judge or designee, county commissioner or designee and county sheriff or designee. Unless a waiver is approved by the seven-member grant commission, grants will reimburse counties for security-related spending specified in the grant applications.

Editors Note: For additional comment and information, the following county officials have agreed to be available for interviews:

- 18th Judicial District Chief Judge William Sylvester: (303) 649-6302
- Lincoln County Sheriff Thomas Nestor: (719) 743-2426
- Costilla County Commissioner Ed Vigil: (719) 588-2141