

Program Narrative

The Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) intends to utilize Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program Year 2026 funds to enhance officer safety, improve situational awareness, and expand unmanned aircraft system (UAS) operations throughout its area of responsibility (AOR) in South Texas.

Hidalgo County is located along the United States-Mexico border and encompasses a large and diverse geographic area that includes rural communities, agricultural fields, drainage canals, dense brush, ranchland, and other difficult-to-access terrain. These conditions create significant challenges when deputies are attempting to locate individuals who flee from law enforcement or conceal themselves in areas with limited visibility. Hidalgo County's border location also presents unique public safety challenges associated with drug trafficking, human smuggling, organized criminal activity, and individuals attempting to evade law enforcement. Criminal activity may occur across remote and rural areas where traditional ground-based patrol methods provide limited visibility. A drone system would allow HCSO personnel to conduct aerial reconnaissance, locate and monitor suspects, identify potential escape routes, and provide real-time information to ground personnel without unnecessarily exposing officers to hazardous terrain.

UAS technology would also serve as a force multiplier during high-risk and tactical operations. Drones can assist personnel in assessing the exterior layout of structures, identifying potential entry and exit points, observing surrounding areas, and identifying potential threats before officers enter a location. Additionally, UAS capabilities can support searches for missing or endangered persons, crime-scene documentation, large-area incident assessments, and emergency response operations.

JAG funding would provide HCSO with the resources necessary to strengthen its existing drone capabilities and address the unique geographic and public safety challenges of a South Texas border community. Expanding UAS operations will improve HCSO's ability to gather critical information, coordinate law enforcement resources, respond to criminal activity, and protect both deputies and the public.

Hidalgo County Judge
Richard F. Cortez