

Yellowstone County



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February 14, 2023

Senior Advisory Committee
C/O MT DES
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Senior Advisory Committee Members:

On behalf of the Yellowstone County Board of County Commissioners, we are writing in support of Yellowstone County Disaster and Emergency Services application for the Elections, Courthouse, and Large Crowd Safety and Security project under the FY 2023 State Homeland Security Program grant.

The project will be to install security and surveillance cameras in and around the Yellowstone County Courthouse and the Courthouse lawn. The Yellowstone County Courthouse is the building that houses the Elections Department, District Court, Justice Court, County Attorney's Office, Court Services, Motor Vehicle Department, Superintendent of Schools, County Treasurer, Facilities Department, G.I.S. Department, County I.T., and Human Resources. The Yellowstone County Courthouse Lawn is a designated area for public displays and protests.

With the rise in violence and terrorism in the United States, advanced, highly sophisticated courthouse security is imperative to the safety of people and property as well as the integrity of judicial proceedings. The Yellowstone County Courthouse is the busiest county courthouse in Montana and serves roughly 10-15% of the State's total population. Incidents of violent attacks and disruptions within courtrooms and courthouse corridors, stairways, and judges' chambers have increased, some causing fatalities. Throughout the country, due to lack of or minimal courthouse security, some judges have refused to hear cases. Violent courthouse incidents have doubled since 2005, according to a Center for Judicial and Executive Security (CJES) report. Over half of violent courtroom and courthouse attacks have been committed against courtroom judges and other staff, lawyers, and police officers. Not only is the protection of these people imperative, but courthouse administrators also have a responsibility to protect the public.

The Yellowstone County Courthouse is easily accessible, attracts large numbers of people on a predictable or semi-predictable basis, and may be vulnerable to attacks using simple tactics and readily available weapons and is therefore classified as a "Soft Target and Crowded Place" according to the Department of Homeland Security. One of the recommended best practices, according to the Department of Homeland Security, for achieving better safety and security of the courthouse is the use of surveillance camera systems.

Also, the Department of Homeland Security and the Cybersecurity Infrastructure Security Agency conducted an Infrastructure Survey Security and Resilience Report for the Yellowstone County Courthouse on September 28, 2021. According to this survey, several gaps were identified in the overall safety and security of the Yellowstone County Courthouse. One major identified gap was the lack of threat monitoring management and remediation. This project will improve our ability to monitor threats in real time and proactively create a threat monitoring and threat management program.

As stated earlier, the Yellowstone County Elections Department is located within the courthouse. Elections play a vital role in a free and fair society and are a cornerstone of American democracy. We recognize the fundamental link between the trust in election infrastructure and the confidence the American public places in basic democratic function. Common best practices include using locks, tamper-evident seals, security cameras, system testing before and after elections, audits, and physical and cybersecurity access controls. Election infrastructure was designated as part of the nation's critical infrastructure as a subsector under the Government Facilities sector in January 2017.

The Yellowstone County Elections, Courthouse, and Large Crowd Safety and Security Project addresses key priorities of the SHSG including:

1. **Improving cybersecurity** by improving cybersecurity of critical infrastructure to meet minimum levels identified by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency
2. **Soft targets and crowded places** by creating physical security enhancements
3. **Intelligence and information sharing** by allowing key stakeholders and security officials to have real time situational awareness and recorded records of events for investigative purposes
4. **Domestic violent extremism** by allowing real time surveillance of crowds and individuals allowing better and more efficient reaction and planning
5. **Elections security** by creating a better physical security system

We thank you for your consideration of this much needed project and look forward to a safer Yellowstone County.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY, MONTANA

John Ostlund, Chair

Mark Morse, Member

Donald W. Jones, Member