

Montana Department of Justice

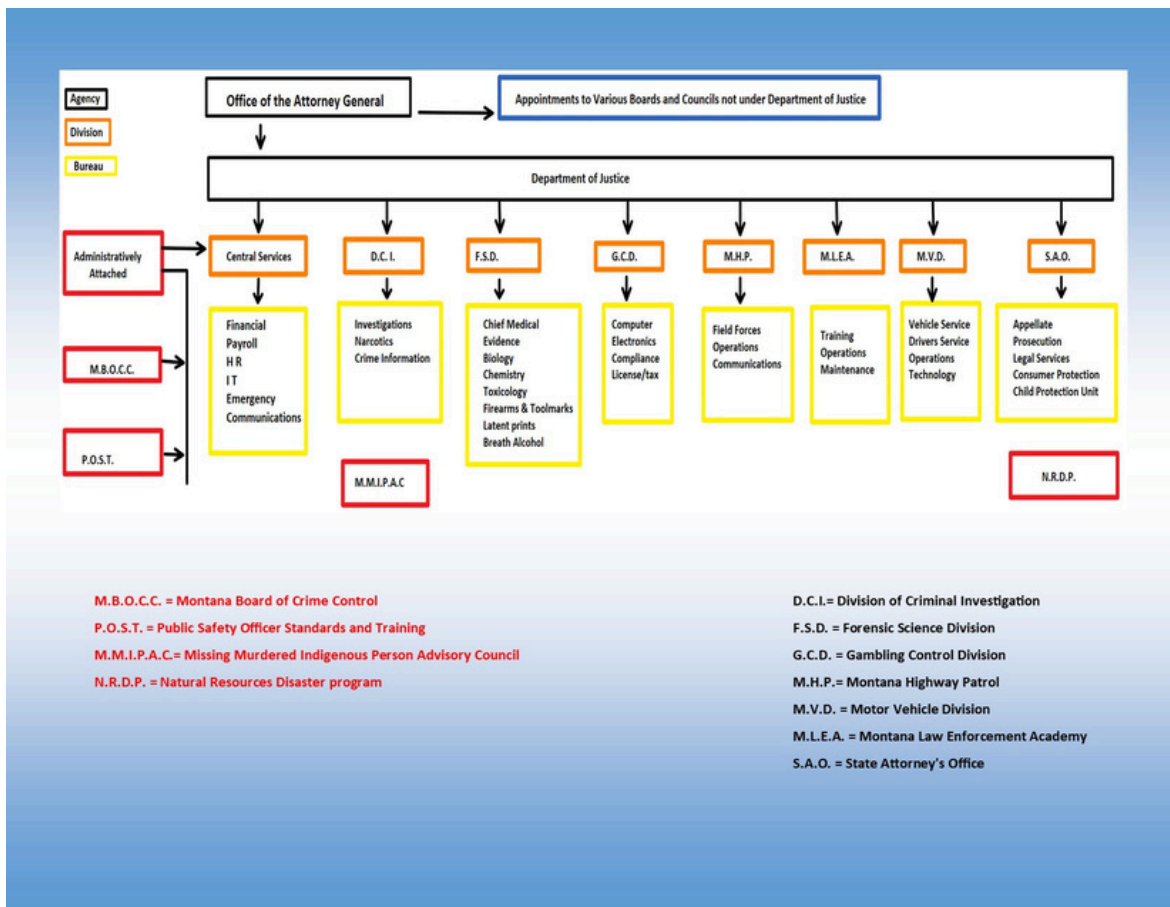
2026 Performance Report



Overview

The Department of Justice is led by Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen and is Montana's top law enforcement and legal agency. We work in every corner of the state maintaining public safety, prosecuting criminals, representing the state of Montana in court, registering vehicles, licensing drivers and more.

We are the Montana Highway Patrol. We are Montana State Crime Lab and the Montana Law Enforcement Academy. We are the Sexual and Violent Offender Registry and the Office of Consumer Protection. We are the lawyers who defend Montana in court and the lawyers who file suit on the state's behalf when Montana has been wronged.





Division Overview

Central Services Division

Administrator Melissa Gardner

Located primarily in Helena, the Central Services Division houses Justice Information and Technology Services, Human Resources, Budget, Accounting, Contracts/Procurement, and Emergency Communications teams.

Division of Criminal Investigation

Administrator Lee Johnson

The Division of Criminal Investigation is headquartered in Helena with regional offices around the state. DCI delivers the highest level of criminal investigative services to law enforcement departments throughout the state, to include major crimes, narcotics, human trafficking, internet/computer crimes, sexual/violent offender compliance, and numerous specialized programs to combat fraud. DCI also supports a robust network of criminal records and identification services, technical information assistance, and support to missing persons and victims of crime.

Forensic Science Division

Administrator Travis Spinder

FSD's main facility is located in Missoula and houses the Biology Section, Chemistry, Firearms & Toolmarks, Latent Prints, Toxicology, Breath Alcohol, and Medical Examiner. The satellite facility located in Billings houses a Chemistry section and Medical Examiner for the eastern side of the state.

Gambling Control Division

Administrator Alex Sterhan

The Gambling Control Division, (GCD) of the Department of Justice regulates all forms of gambling in Montana, except for the Montana Lottery (including sports betting) and Horseracing. Through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Department of Revenue, GCD also regulates alcohol and tobacco laws and rules.

Montana Highway Patrol

Colonel Kurt Sager

Montana Highway Patrol Division focuses on safeguarding the lives and constitutional rights of people traveling the ways of our state. We provide courteous, professional, compassionate, and responsive services in the areas of community education, enforcement, investigations, support services, interagency collaboration, and community involvement. We are committed to maintaining the public's trust, being technologically advanced, and efficiently using the resources entrusted to us.

Montana Law Enforcement Academy

Administrator Joel Wendland

The mission of the Montana Department of Justice Law Enforcement Academy is to serve law enforcement agencies and the communities they represent by providing a positive atmosphere where relevant and realistic training for new and veteran public safety professionals occurs.

Motor Vehicle Division

Administrator Laurie Bakri

The Motor Vehicle Division is committed to providing the exemplary customer service Montanans deserve, and oversees 48 exam locations across the state to serve Montanans and has 71 partner locations with county treasurer offices and authorized agents.

State Attorney's Office

Administrator Jason Johnson

The State Attorney's Office is headquartered in Helena where the Civil Bureau, Appellate Bureau, Agency Legal Services, Prosecution Services, Office of Consumer Protection, and National Resources Damages (administratively attached) are housed. There are also Child Protection Units in Missoula and Billings.



GOAL #1: Increase mental health resources

The Montana Department of Justice is committed to supporting its dedicated staff with comprehensive mental and spiritual health resources through a Chaplain program to ensure the resilience and strength of the workforce, many of whom protect and defend the cherished Montana way of life. To supplement the Chaplain program, the Department will be partnering with the Florence Crittenton Training Institute to offer further mental health resources to help them deal with the stress and other challenges that can be particularly difficult over the course of a career in law enforcement, prosecution, and appeals.

Performance Measures:

1) Increase the use of the chaplaincy program by DOJ employees from zero to an average of 30-40 per year by year two.

- **ACCOMPLISHMENT:** DOJ employees reached out for chaplain services 34 times. There has been significant progress in building trust with DOJ staff. Chaplains are driving program use through office visits, shared meals, ride-a-longs with troopers, and introductory meetings across the state. These efforts have directly led to deeper personal conversations and established trust resulting in additional requests for chaplain integration and use. As a result of their proactivity, there were a total of 140+ chaplain services provided.

2) Increase the number of critical incidents DOJ chaplains are used as a resource from zero to 10-15 by year two by building confidence with law enforcement personnel.

- **ACCOMPLISHMENT:** There were 12 responses recorded since July 2025. Chaplains are building critical field confidence by participating in trooper ride-a-longs and attending MHP district meetings. As a result, chaplains successfully deployed to provide on-scene grief counseling, debriefings, and mental health support during fatal crashes, suicides, and traumatic events.

3) Implement ongoing and effective training to support DOJ chaplains. In addition to hosting quarterly training courses all DOJ chaplains need to be basic certified by the International Conference of Police Chaplains or another reputable organization. x

- **ACCOMPLISHMENT:** DOJ chaplains are consistently attending scheduled quarterly training sessions and professional conferences. Professional development is currently focused on trauma-informed care, PTSD resources, resilience, and crisis response while networking with regional first responder support organizations. Five chaplains have made progress towards or completed ICPC certification. DOJ chaplains will be attending the MHP Critical Incident Stress Management training in September to help the chaplains be “on the same page” when responding to critical incidents.

GOAL #2: Improve efficiencies

DOJ leadership is committed to making the Department as efficient as possible. To do so, the Department is working to restructure bureaus and divisions and provide excellent customer service to Montanans.

Performance Measures:

1) Discontinue services provided by the Agency Legal Services Bureau (ALSB) following a comprehensive and long-term review of the bureau's viability and operational effectiveness.

- **ACCOMPLISHMENT:** The services provided by ALSB were discontinued, improving government efficiency and saving taxpayer dollars.

2) Reorganize the Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) for better alignment of services, more cohesiveness between programs, and better distribution of workload.

- **ACCOMPLISHMENT:** DCI's four bureaus were streamlined into three, as victim services programs migrated to the Crime Information Bureau. Deputy bureau chiefs were added to two bureaus and the Major Case Section supervisory structure was split into western and eastern districts for better caseload management.



GOAL #2: Improve efficiencies (*cont.*)

3) Continue to improve efficiencies and promote CARS online services at the Motor Vehicle Division (MVD) to increase the speed of services and ease of use for Montanans.

- **ACCOMPLISHMENT:** MVD refined and enhanced vehicle modernization efforts within CARS, significantly improving overall system performance. Building on these updates, the previous year's backlog has decreased by 80 percent. Transaction times remain at just two minutes, maximinzing overall work production. Average call wait times have dropped dramatically by 76 percent - falling from 22 minutes to five minutes.

GOAL #3: Improve retention and recruitment

It has become increasingly difficult to recruit law enforcement officers as the cost of living in Montana has skyrocketed. The Department is committed to continuing to put an increased emphasis on recruitment and focus on how to retain current public safety personnel.

Performance Measures:

1) Hire 30 people for trooper positions.

- **ACCOMPLISHMENT:** Hired 35 troopers.

2) Hire 10 people for public communications specialist positions.

- **ACCOMPLISHMENT:** Hired 18 public communications specialists.

3) Create a uniform position inside the Patrol dedicated to wellness initiatives that will lead to increased retention and improved employee performance.

- **ACCOMPLISHMENT:** MHP created and staffed the position of wellness sergeant. The wellness sergeant oversees the Patrol's wellness programs, serves as a resource to employees regarding various types of wellness issues, researches and applies for available programs and grant opportunities, and is responsible for the administration and tracking of standards withing the wellness program.