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Member of the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties

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RE: SB164

Testimony provided by Nils Andreassen, Executive Director

The Alaska Municipal League welcomes this legislation offered by the Governor and recognizes the important contribution it makes to further enhancing public safety in Alaska. While this bill affects potentially 100 communities, there are currently 39 with VPOs. Note that APSC's list has 18; the difference is capacity to comply with reporting.

- Combined population of 19,749
- Average number of employees = 8
- Combined budgets of \$30,990,334; average of \$860,000
- Combined tax revenue of \$3,389,906
- Community Assistance = \$3 million, which will see a \$300,000 reduction this year
- All but four were on DCRA's Stressed Communities list, which means they lack sufficient capacity to meet many current requirements

Essentially, these are cities that have limited tax bases, have assumed responsibilities that meet the needs of residents and that the State is not currently providing, and are struggling to keep the lights on. I can juxtapose that with municipal law enforcement, and the 39 municipalities that have active police departments. Their combined budgets just for public safety are \$270 million, or roughly \$75 million more than the Department of Public Safety, or nine times the entire budgets of these VPO communities.

I called these communities, and overwhelmingly heard that this bill would improve public safety in the State. But there was also overwhelming concern that this doesn't change the reality of being unable to access a qualified pool of candidates for these positions, nor does it augment the capacity of local governments to recruit and retain qualified officers.

I recognize that this is part of a larger conversation, but I also think there's an opportunity with this bill to offer incentives to communities by funding this mandate. Let me be clear – the mandate is necessary. It's also necessary to supplement the requirements that come with this responsibility.

I would encourage this Committee to consider amending this bill, and adding a base level of funding that covers some of the essentials – help to offset police professional liability insurance, provide uniforms, bulletproof vests and housing if necessary, and ensure training and travel funds are available.

The definition of Village Police Officer indicates that this only applies to incorporated cities; it would more appropriately be called Remote City Police Officer in recognition of the role of these political subdivisions of the State.

We're appreciative of the opportunity to address a clear challenge facing local governments. I hope that we can take multiple steps to meet public safety needs in these communities.