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January 31, 2018

House State Affairs
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska

RE: HB 293 – An Act relating to powers of the Alaska Police Standards Council; and relating to background checks for admission to police training programs and certification as a police officer.

Dear Chairman Kreiss-Tomkins,

When I appeared at your committee hearing on January 30, 2018, I was not intending to testify on HB 293 as I saw it as a Public Safety Department issue; not a municipal issue. However, many comments were made that provided an impetus for me to offer some thoughts.

According to the mission of AML, this appears to be a good bill; one that would positively enhance the ability of small municipalities to be able to fill public safety positions within their municipality. As I walked into the hearing last Tuesday, however, I found the discussion in your committee moving towards solutions other than those requested in HB 293. Here is why I would request that this bill pass out of your committee, as written.

There were a few mentions made of turning this ability to do background checks, over to the specific municipality requesting the service. To begin with, this is a problem that arises with so much legislation. If there are questions pertaining to municipalities being “given” a new power, we would hope that there be discussion with municipalities before a decision like that is entered into. Municipalities have seen Community Assistance payments drop by more than half over the last two years. Many of the small municipalities are down to one or two employees. Hardly enough to be trained and do all the paperwork involved with background checks. To be able to have this service performed by the State and/or the Police Standards Council is a positive for municipalities. The mention was also made that there was doubt about the zero fiscal note. If the comment is true that all legislation imposes a cost, why would we saddle this extra cost on municipalities who would then have certain “set-up” costs to implement these laws. At this point, the State agencies involved already do this and would be adding more checks to those already being performed.

Secondly, municipalities would have to then turn these background checks back over to the State, as municipalities do NOT have a government-to-government relationship with the federal government. That is why most money that comes to municipalities (other

than federal grants) are “pass-through” funds. They pass through from the federal government to the state government to the political subdivision. The City of Kwethluk cannot simply go to the FBI with a request on a background check (or with anything else for that matter).

So, my request, on behalf of Alaska’s municipalities would be for this committee to pass this bill through as requested. Please do not attempt to “re-write” something that is basically a bill intended to make things operate more efficiently and effectively.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathie Wasserman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Kathie" on the top line and "Wasserman" on the bottom line.

Kathie Wasserman
Executive Director