

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
February 17, 2022
1:35 p.m.

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CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Foster called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 1:35 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Neal Foster, Co-Chair
Representative Kelly Merrick, Co-Chair
Representative Dan Ortiz, Vice-Chair
Representative Bryce Edgmon
Representative Andy Josephson
Representative Bart LeBon
Representative Sara Rasmussen
Representative Steve Thompson
Representative Adam Wool (via teleconference)

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Ben Carpenter
Representative DeLena Johnson

ALSO PRESENT

Leon Morgan, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Public Safety; Kelly Howell, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Department of Public Safety; James Cockrell, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety; Diane Casto, Executive Director, Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Department of Public Safety.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Colonel Bryan Barlow, Director, Alaska State Troopers, Department of Public Safety.

SUMMARY

HB 281 APPROP: OPERATING BUDGET/LOANS/FUNDS

HB 281 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 282 APPROP: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET

HB 282 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

PRESENTATION: DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

Co-Chair Foster reviewed the meeting agenda.

#hb281

#hb282

HOUSE BILL NO. 281

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and loan program expenses of state government and for certain programs; capitalizing funds; amending appropriations; making reappropriations; making supplemental appropriations; making appropriations under art. IX, sec. 17(c), Constitution of the State of Alaska, from the constitutional budget reserve fund; and providing for an effective date."

HOUSE BILL NO. 282

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and capital expenses of the state's integrated comprehensive mental health program; making capital appropriations and supplemental appropriations; and providing for an effective date."

^PRESENTATION: DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

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LEON MORGAN, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, introduced himself.

KELLY HOWELL, SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, introduced herself

JAMES COCKRELL, COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, introduced staff in the audience. He believed he had the finest leadership staff the Department of Public Safety (DPS) had ever had. He detailed that he had traveled around

the state meeting with the people of Alaska, and he wanted citizens to know that the department was listening to their concerns. He reported the state had the highest rate in the country of sexual assault and domestic violence per capita and the Yukon-Kuskokwim (YK) Delta had the highest rates in the state. There were more sexual assaults reported in the Bethel region than in the city of Anchorage. The department had met with the Calista Corporation in the YK Delta to discuss the topic. He detailed that the murder rate of women was high in the state and many of the victims were Alaska Native.

Commissioner Cockrell continued that the department was focusing on its statutory requirements and concentrating specifically on revitalizing the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program in rural Alaska. He emphasized that the department was committed to growing the VPSO program in addition to growing the number of Alaska State Troopers (AST) on Alaska's roads. He was confident that if the department received all the requested funds in the budget, it would be able to provide increased safety to citizens and ultimately save lives. He relayed that when he started at the department about 40 years ago, AST had 308 authorized positions; in 2022, there were 315 positions. He thought state funds had been allocated disproportionately to urban areas and that rural areas were suffering. If the trend continued, the federal government would have to fill the void. He asserted that the state had an obligation to provide adequate and professional law enforcement to all communities. The department would continue to ask for more resources because providing law enforcement was not cheap.

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Representative Thompson asked how the process was going of finding housing in rural areas for public safety workers.

Commissioner Cockrell replied that there had been productive conversations on housing in the department's subcommittees. The department was struggling with finding housing and was continuing to look for creative solutions.

Ms. Howell introduced a PowerPoint presentation titled "Department of Public Safety FY2023 Department Overview," dated February 17, 2022 (copy on file). She began on slide 2. The department's mission was to ensure public safety and enforce fish and wildlife laws. She listed some key

objectives, including the recruitment and retention of staff, rural Alaska law enforcement and safety, domestic violence and sexual assault, revitalizing the VPSO program, commercial fishing and hunting, and narcotics and major investigations.

Vice-Chair Ortiz referenced Ms. Howell's statement about revitalizing the VPSO program. He asked if more would be done to improve the program in addition to increasing the number of VPSOs.

Commissioner Cockrell answered that one of the first things he had done when he came to the department was moving the VPSO program directly into the commissioner's office. He thought the action provided the program with the prominence and oversight that it deserved. The department had recently hired retired colonel Mr. Joel Hard to be the director of the VPSO program and Mr. Hard had full freedom to change the program in the department's desired direction. The department wanted to provide more flexibility for the grantees to run the program in the way that would best meet the needs of the tribes and communities.

Commissioner Cockrell noted the high number of suicides in rural communities and relayed that a community could choose to hire someone specifically trained in suicide prevention instead of a VPSO. The scope of VPSOs had changed in recent years from a public safety officer that was likely from the local village to a law enforcement officer who had likely not grown up in the village or even in Alaska. The department wanted to give a VPSO to any community that wanted one. He indicated that the department had funding for about 55 VPSOs and the governor had authorized an additional 10 positions, but realistically, the number needed to almost double. Around 15 years ago, the YK Delta had between 20 and 30 VPSOs and it currently only had three. The Bethel region had 57 villages and it was likely that around 50 of them did not currently have a law enforcement presence unless the village had a VPSO. The department was authorized to employ 315 officers and he wanted to increase the number to 415 officers.

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Co-Chair Foster asked for the number of VPSOs in the past compared to the present.

Commissioner Cockrell answered that funding was currently available for 55 VPSOs, the department had 48 "boots on the ground," and the governor's budget would allow for up to 65 VPSOs. There were around 114 VPSOS in 2014, but the number had been continuously decreasing partially due to budget cuts in FY 15 through FY 17. One of the things on which the department had been judged was the amount of funding in the VPSO program that had been returned. He explained that part of the issue was that the department ran the VPSO program the same way it ran its own budget, which did not work for the VPSO program. The department was not addressing the variety of complicated elements involved in the VPSO program. He believed the handling of the program had been a failure but the department was now going in a different direction. He asked the legislature to permit the flexibility that he thought was necessary to meet the needs of each individual community.

Co-Chair Merrick shared that she had chaired the DPS subcommittee. She complimented Mr. Hard who had very recently taken over the VPSO program. She looked forward to the work he would do.

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Ms. Howell advanced to slide 3 and turned it over to her colleague, Mr. Morgan.

Mr. Morgan addressed slide 3 regarding the statewide impact of DPS. He read from the slide as follows:

- DPS is Alaska's primary statewide law enforcement agency
- Direct support to other agencies
 - Investigative assistance
 - Search and rescue
 - Training
 - Alaska Public Safety Information Network
 - Crime Lab

Ms. Howell turned to a 10-year lookback of the department's operating budget on slide 4. She did not have the dollar figures listed for the various fund sources and directed the committee's attention to the Legislative Finance Division's (LFD) graphs that showed the numbers. The FY 23 budget request reflected an overall increase from FY 22 of about \$36.6 million. She noted that about \$24 million of

the request was comprised of unrestricted general funds (UGF). However, \$9.7 million of the overall increase was related to the transfer of the Alaska Public Safety Communications Services (APSCS) from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) into DPS.

Ms. Howell moved to slide 5 and discussed the department's position history. There was a significant increase of 93 permanent full-time positions from FY 22 to FY 23; however 24 of the positions were transferred in from DMVA. There were 17 new state trooper positions; 14 were Alaska State Troopers and three were Alaska Wildlife Troopers. Additionally, 46 civilian positions were added to provide support to troopers and enhance other priority programs such as the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons program and domestic violence and sexual assault.

Vice-Chair Ortiz asked if there were projections showing the number of troopers the department anticipated would retire in the coming five years.

Mr. Morgan responded that in the next one to five years, there were 130 state trooper positions eligible for retirement. The department was aware that there could be a significant shift in the workforce and it was critical to acknowledge the shift when strategizing recruitment and retention efforts.

Representative LeBon looked at slide 5 showing the authorized positions and the request for additional positions in FY 23. He asked for the current number of vacancies the department was trying to fill in addition to the 17 new trooper positions.

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Ms. Howell advanced to the state trooper position history on slide 6 to respond to Representative LeBon's question. She shared that the number of vacancies for all public safety positions was in the mid-60s. The number of vacancies for AST specifically was around 38, but the number took into account the individuals who would attend the academy within the next two weeks. She believed there would be 67 vacancies if the individuals who would attend the academy were excluded. She noted that there would be multiple academy sessions in the near future and she was

hopeful that the new recruits would come close to filling the vacancies.

Representative LeBon asked if the 17 new trooper positions were in addition to the 67 vacancies.

Mr. Morgan answered that on paper there were 67 vacancies, but the number was expected to decrease to around 30 after the department made job offers to the current recruits in the following week. The department was doing everything it could to keep its number of vacancies at around 30. Maintaining the number of vacancies would allow the department the stability it needed to be able to add more positions the following year. The goal was to get to 415 troopers in the future and account for the upcoming retirements that were currently pending. He explained that it was necessary to have open positions in order to recruit. He reiterated that the goal was to keep 30 positions open in order to stay ahead of the curve.

Representative LeBon understood that recruitment and retention was challenging. He asked where the aforementioned additional 14 ASTs would be located.

Mr. Morgan replied that the breakdown of the positions was the following: one trooper in Fairbanks and one in Tok; one technical flight officer in Fairbanks, one in Anchorage, and one in Tok; one sergeant for the Anchorage Services Unit which supported the Aleutians; and ten sergeants at the training post in the "B" detachment.

Representative LeBon asked for verification the B Detachment was in the Wasilla and Palmer area.

Mr. Morgan agreed.

Representative LeBon asked what situation had taken place to warrant the increased number of troopers in the area.

Mr. Morgan responded the department had taken it upon itself to shuffle troopers geographically to the areas of need, particularly because there had been a dire need in the Tok area. In order to add positions within the department, the positions had to be added to the training posts first and later on would be redistributed to other areas of need in the state. He did not look at it as a permanent position, but as a way to develop a better backup

for future needs. The B Detachment had one of the lowest numbers of assigned troopers and had the highest population to serve.

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Representative LeBon assumed Fairbanks was a training post.

Mr. Morgan agreed.

Representative Josephson was grateful for the department's efforts and commitment. He recalled that Commissioner Cockrell's predecessor had inferred the vacancy problem had been resolved. He thought people did not desire state employment as much as they used to, and difficulties in recruitment and retention could be seen across all state departments. He asked what it would take for people to want to work for the state and remain in their positions.

Commissioner Cockrell answered that police departments were having difficulty recruiting and retaining officers throughout the nation. He thought that Alaska fortunately had more support for its law enforcement officers than other states. However, the department had struggled with hiring its troopers since the late 1990s due to a myriad of reasons. Part of the reason for the retention issue was the amount of work officers were asked to do. He supposed that the workload of trooper was more substantial than the workload of any other law enforcement officer in other states. He had troopers with a caseload of over 100, and knew of a sergeant at a rural post who was responsible for supervising troopers in addition to balancing a caseload of 80. He did not think it was possible for one person to handle the overwhelming caseload, supervise others, make arrests, and go to court.

Commissioner Cockrell continued that a significant driver for the retention issue was that troopers did not have the support that they needed. Troopers were already working an excess amount of overtime and it was difficult to get them to work more overtime hours to perform duties like highway enforcement. He understood the legislature wanted to see the overtime budget decrease, but when the phone rang, the officers had to respond. He did not think that there was a single area in the state with adequate law enforcement, and the department needed to hire more officers to address the

issue and provide the officers with the support that was necessary to do their job.

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Commissioner Cockrell continued to reply to Representative Josephson's question. He emphasized that the state was asking too much of its troopers. He relayed that part of his job was to ensure that troopers were being supported and retained. The state could not afford to continue to lose troopers after a few years of employment due to a lack of support.

Representative Thompson referred to slides 5 and 6. He assumed slide 6 did not include VPSOs.

Ms. Howell agreed. She detailed that the slides showed DPS employees and that VPSOs were employees of the ten grantee organizations.

Representative Thompson asked for confirmation that VPSOs were not state employees.

Ms. Howell confirmed that VPSOs were not state employees.

Vice-Chair Ortiz asked how a caseload worked for a trooper.

Commissioner Cockrell answered that every case represented a call for service that a trooper answered, and a caseload was composed of the calls answered by an individual trooper. Every criminal offence was a case, which included offenses like driving under the influence or driving with a suspended license. A trooper was responsible for a case until it was closed, which required completing a substantial amount of paperwork and filling reports. He noted that the average caseload was 80 to 100 in the Matanuska-Susitna (Mat-Su) Valley. In the past two days alone, the department had arrested three people in Mat-Su for sexual abuse of a minor. There was currently a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) operation going on in one of the schools in Mat-Su because a student had gone there in the middle of the night with a gun and threatened the janitor. He relayed that similar events happened every day and the department needed adequate personnel to respond.

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Vice-Chair Ortiz asked if there was a significant pay differential for people serving in rural areas as compared to urban areas.

Commissioner Cockrell responded that the department had offered a \$20,000 sign-on bonus as an incentive for officers in rural areas, which had improved the recruitment numbers. He was pleased with the new recruits from the academies and was confident that there would be more successful recruits to come from future academies. He shared that AST was still seen as one of the best law enforcement agencies in the country for employment because of the focus on employee support. He relayed that the department was continuing to address the devastating cutbacks of almost 40 positions in 2015 through 2017. It was difficult to recruit when the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) was reporting that more troopers would need to be laid off. He thought it seemed there was talk of shutting down the government every summer, which impacted the morale of employees.

Co-Chair Merrick asked for verification that there was a \$20,000 sign-on bonus.

Commissioner Cockrell replied in the affirmative.

Co-Chair Merrick she asked what kind of commitment was required from a recruit to be eligible for the bonus.

Commissioner Cockrell responded that once a recruit passed the academy, they would receive a \$10,000 bonus, then receive the additional \$10,000 when they passed the Field Training Officer (FTO) period and probational period.

Co-Chair Merrick asked how long the probational period was.

Commissioner Cockrell responded it was one year.

Representative Thompson commented that it seemed difficult to manage troopers in remote areas who were often required to travel to urban areas to attend court. He asked how the troopers ensured that areas were not without an officer when there was required travel.

Commissioner Cockrell deferred to his colleague Colonel Bryan Barlow.

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COLONEL BRYAN BARLOW, DIRECTOR, ALASKA STATE TROOPERS, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY (via teleconference), answered that the troopers utilized staff from all over the state to backfill understaffed areas. The troopers could utilize resources like state aircrafts when necessary to quickly transport employees.

Representative Rasmussen asked how often perpetrators were repeat offenders.

Commissioner Cockrell responded that he could not answer.

Representative Rasmussen asked if it was common for a perpetrator to have multiple victims and repeat offenses.

Commissioner Cockrell replied that Alaska had a high recidivism rate. There was a recent case where a trooper was shot on duty by an individual who was on an Own Recognizance (OR) release from prison. The trooper was shot five times and his vest saved his life.

Representative Rasmussen was grateful the department had the proper equipment. She stated that roughly 60 percent of women in the state had indicated they had been sexually assaulted or a victim of domestic violence. She asked if 60 percent of Alaskans were also committing the offenses or if it was a smaller number of perpetrators with numerous victims.

Commissioner Cockrell responded that the state had a problem with domestic violence and sexual assault. He did not want to speculate on the reasons because there could be a multitude of factors. He thought the victimization surveys were highly accurate, perhaps even more so than the crime rate statistics. It was not common for domestic violence cases to be first-time occurrences.

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DIANE CASTO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COUNCIL ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, agreed that the victimization surveys were the most accurate barometer of the situation. She did not have the exact number of repeat offenders, but it was clear that it was common for there to be multiple instances of sexual assault and domestic violence by the same perpetrator. Part of the goal was to stop the perpetrators and reframe the issue so there were no longer multiple victims.

Representative Edgmon stated there had been a situation in Aniak about a week earlier and the U.S. Marshals Service was called in to respond. He asked for more detail on the efforts of marshals in Alaska and wondered if it was a small concentrated application of resources.

Commissioner Cockrell responded that the department had a partnership with the U.S. Marshals, as it did with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other federal agencies. He explained that the department utilized marshals for high-risk arrests and guessed that there were fewer than 10 marshals in Alaska. The situation in Aniak was classified as a high-risk arrest, therefore a marshal was asked to step in.

Representative Edgmon believed it went without saying that high-risk events had likely increased over time. He asked if his understanding was correct.

Commissioner Cockrell answered that he believed it was a fairly accurate statement. The attempted use of deadly force on law enforcement officers in the state had risen since he had become a trooper, and unfortunately officers also had to use deadly force to respond to situations. He added that application of CERT had also increased over the years.

Representative Edgmon asked for more information about drug search dogs and asked how many dogs and handlers were active in the state.

Commissioner Cockrell did not have the information on hand but could supply an answer in writing. He deferred to Colonel Barlow.

Colonel Barlow did not have the exact number but would compile the information. There were dual purpose canine

teams and single purpose teams located in various locations throughout the state.

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Ms. Howell turned to slide 7 and explained that she would address the significant budget changes over the next 10 slides. She indicated that slide 7 showed the budget changes for the fire and life safety appropriation. There was a request for the addition of a Deputy Fire Marshal 2 in Bethel for rural fire investigations. The cost of the position and the related equipment and support would be one-time funding. There was also a request for more funding for rural fire training and education.

Ms. Howell addressed the AST appropriation on slide 8. She read through the significant operating budget changes for FY 23 as follows:

- Establish New Dispatch Services Allocation
- Add Funding for Dispatch Services Contract with Kenai Peninsula Borough - \$1,819.4 UGF
- Add Twelve State Troopers and Two Public Safety Technician Positions - No additional funding and 14 PFT [Permanent full-time]
- Expand In-Car Video Storage Services - \$631.5 UGF

Representative LeBon asked about the additional trooper and two public safety technician positions. He asked if the legislature could expect a budget request in January of 2023 if the department was successful in filling the positions.

Mr. Morgan responded in the affirmative. He wanted to show the legislature that the department could fill the positions and he expected to come back with an amended budget once the positions were filled.

Vice-Chair Ortiz asked for the current status of dispatch in the Ketchikan station.

Mr. Morgan responded that the Ketchikan Dispatch Center still had the capacity to dispatch and the positions had been retained in Ketchikan. The focus of the center had been adjusted to handle the online police reporting team and validations team, which encompassed numerous

administrative functions. The department planned to go live with its new online police reporting function in two weeks.

Vice-Chair Ortiz asked for clarification that the dispatch function was not currently carried out by anyone in Ketchikan.

Mr. Morgan confirmed that Fairbanks was dispatching for Ketchikan.

Vice-Chair Ortiz asked if there had been any analysis on the effectiveness of dispatching for Ketchikan from the Fairbanks center. He thought dispatch might not be as effective if the dispatcher was not familiar with the Ketchikan area.

Mr. Morgan replied that he was aware of two complaints related to dispatch over the past year. However, it had been determined that the complaints were not the fault of dispatch but were due to the timing of the deployment of troopers out of stand-by status. He shared that dispatch had been based out of Fairbanks for over a decade and it was not necessary for dispatchers to be familiar with all areas of the state because the troopers on the ground were familiar with the areas in which they were based. He felt confident in the department's ability to dispatch across the state.

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Co-Chair Merrick asked about the estimated cost of the 14 new trooper positions listed on slide 8.

Ms. Howell would follow up with the information.

Co-Chair Merrick asked how long the department had to retain the recordings from body and car cameras ("cams").

Mr. Morgan answered that it depended on the type of case and there were statutes and regulations that governed the retention. The department could be required to keep recordings in perpetuity if it was related to a homicide case, or 90 days if it was a less serious offense.

Representative Thompson asked if troopers experienced communication problems in remote areas.

Mr. Morgan answered affirmatively. He elaborated that part of the reason why APSCS was being transferred to DPS was because the department could better embed the program into the public safety response mission instead of it being in a different department. The department would also be able to leverage emerging technologies such as low earth orbit satellite networks. He shared that the department would consider all possible solutions in order to expand connectivity across the state, but specifically in rural Alaska.

Vice-Chair Ortiz asked if the department was aware there had been a connectivity breakdown between Ketchikan and Fairbanks that resulted in an emergency request for Ketchikan to take over dispatch. He wondered what would happen if there was a similar event in the future and there was no one in Ketchikan able to perform dispatch duties.

Mr. Morgan answered that there would always be consulate radios available, and dispatch could still function. The department planned to continue to maintain the emergency dispatch functionality. He was not aware of the specific incident referred to by Vice-Chair Ortiz and would have to research it.

Vice-Chair Ortiz asked if the dispatch would go through the Ketchikan police if an emergency scenario happened in the future.

Mr. Morgan answered in the negative. He clarified that the facility in Ketchikan still functioned, but it was simply not interconnected with the network. There were still personnel staff in Ketchikan that would be able to perform dispatch duties.

Ms. Howell continued with the AST appropriation on slide 9. The department was asking for funding for the trooper positions that were added in FY 21. Several of the positions had been filled and the department was seeking to fund the positions at 100 percent, requiring a \$170,800 increase from the governor's amended budget. She read the rest of the operating budget changes for FY 23 as follows:

- Funding to Establish Office Space in Togiak and Hooper Bay - \$200.0 UGF
- Add Positions to Address DVSA and MMIP - \$818.8 UGF and 7 PFT

- Add Four Criminal Justice Technicians - \$404.4 UGF and 4 PFT

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Ms. Howell continued with the changes to the AST appropriation on slide 10. She read from it as follows:

- Add Positions in the Alaska Bureau of Investigation - \$395.5 UGF and 4 PFT
- Add Positions in the Technical Crimes Unit Digital Forensics Lab - \$234.9 UGF and 2 PFT
- Add Three Alaska Wildlife Trooper Positions - No additional funding and 3 PFT
- Add Funding for Public Safety Technician Time Status Change - \$369.4 UGF, 6 PFT and (6) PPT [Permanent part-time]

Co-Chair Merrick requested for Ms. Howell to include the wildlife troopers to the information the department would provide regarding the cost of the 14 new positions.

Ms. Howell would provide the requested information.

Representative Edgmon compared the criminal justice system to an offensive line in football. He understood the system to be a package in some ways, but in other ways it was not. He asked if the governor had a criminal justice cabinet that comprehensively analyzed all of the elements. He thought it seemed that much of what generated the increases in positions needed to be attended to elsewhere. He supposed that the department could not comment on the topic but thought that it was a legitimate point. He had chaired the Department of Corrections (DOC) budget subcommittee and thought that many positions would be absorbed by DOC, or possibly by the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS). He thought the topic warranted some consideration.

Commissioner Cockrell appreciated the comments but did not have a response. He was on the Criminal Justice Commission and although the commission did not have a conversation about each position that was added to the budget, he was able to see a broader view of the activity of various agencies.

Representative Edgmon understood that the commission was a separate entity and not a subtenant of the department. He asked if there were conversations taking place that involved all of the components of the "offensive line."

Commissioner Cockrell thought that it was a challenging question. He had regular conversations with the administration on the direction of DPS and sometimes other members of the cabinet were part of the conversations. He did not see how the new positions would affect DOC or DHSS. He thought that he perhaps did not fully understand Representative Edgmon's question.

Representative Edgmon respected the answer. He thought the additional positions would generate more people going through DOC, which could potentially impact the court system and the Department of Law (DOL) and DHSS.

Commissioner Cockrell stated that the new positions could potentially cause more people to go to jail, but it held people accountable for their actions. He thought it would provide more tools for the department to better perform its duties.

Vice-Chair Ortiz thought that everyone supported the role of the troopers in the fight against crime in the state. He thought it was necessary to employ a broader effort to look upstream to reduce the crime problem. He asked how the state could position itself to reduce the crime rate in the long run so that it was no longer expected that the crime rate would increase every year. He stated it was a large question and not solely the responsibility of the DPS commissioner. He thought the state needed to make investments in areas like education to reduce the crime rate over time.

Commissioner Cockrell understood the benefits of a holistic approach. Part of the problem was that the department went through the budget process annually and it was difficult to coordinate the process. Additionally, there were election cycles that produced high turnover rates, which made it difficult to have meetings to strategize ways to tackle the big issues. Each department was focused on its own mission, and he had not sat down with the other departments apart from DOC.

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Ms. Howell continued with the AST appropriation on slide 11. She read from the slide as follows:

- Add Two State Trooper Tactical Flight Officers and One Aircraft Pilot - \$614.2 UGF and 3 PFT
- Add Funding for Aircraft Maintenance and Repairs - \$1,800.0 UGF
- Add Funding for Large and Medium Vessel Fuel and Parts - \$500.0 UGF

Ms. Howell turned to the VPSO appropriation on slide 12. She read the information as follows:

- Add Tribal Liaison Position - \$125.5 UGF and 1 PFT
- Add Funding for Ten Village Public Safety Officers - \$2,328.0 UGF
- Funding 5% Salary Increase for VPSOs - \$617.6 UGF

Ms. Howell addressed slide 13 related to the Council on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault (CDVSA) appropriation. She read through the slide as follows:

- One-Time Funding for Victim Services Grants - \$3,500.0 Fed/CSLFRF [Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds]
- Add Two Program Coordinator Positions to Manage Victim Services and Perpetrator Intervention Programs - \$93.2 Fed, \$193.2 UGF and 2 PFT
- One-Time Funding for Alaska Family Justice Center Model Study - \$500.0 UGF

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Representative LeBon referenced the Alaska Family Justice Center (AFJC) model on slide 13 and thought that \$500,000 seemed expensive for a study. He asked if Ms. Howell could offer reassurance to make him feel comfortable with the cost.

Ms. Howell responded that the model was part of the governor's People First initiative. She explained that the model could be effective where the resources were available; however, in smaller communities it was common for a person to receive all services in one facility, whether that be legal advocacy, law enforcement, or medical

assistance. The model would allow for a more victim centered approach to be employed. It was not yet apparent if the model would work in smaller communities, but it would work in communities where the resources were available. She was not certain if the model would cost the full \$500,000 until the contract was procured, but it was the estimate that was currently in place.

Representative LeBon asked if the \$500,000 was a placeholder figure.

Ms. Howell answered that the state procurement rules required that the department release an estimate as a competitive solicitation. She confirmed that the total cost could come in lower than \$500,000.

Co-Chair Merrick asked if the state would get a refund if the amount came in below \$500,000.

Ms. Howell would ask OMB.

Co-Chair Merrick thought it would be interesting if the money could be used elsewhere in the department if a refund was not possible.

Ms. Howell advanced to slide 14 showing the statewide support appropriation. She read from the slide as follows:

- Add Tribal Liaison Position - \$125.5 UGF, 1 PFT
- Funding for Two Analyst/Programmers, a Geographic Information Systems Analyst, and Two Data Communication Specialists - \$700.3 UGF and 5 PFT
- Increase Designated Program Receipt Authority for Criminal Background Checks - \$622.4 DGF [Designated general funds]
- Funding Six Criminal Justice Positions to Support Validation Audits - \$606.3 Fed, \$67.4 UGF, and 6 PFT

Ms. Howell continued to review the statewide support appropriation on slide 15 as follows:

- Criminal Records Improvement Projects -\$4,841.3 Fed
- Increase Federal Receipt Authority for Existing Multi-Year Grants for Forensics, DNA, and Sexual Assault Kit Tracking - \$627.0 Fed

- Funding Six Positions to Reduce Turnaround Time on DNA Testing -\$1,229.3 UGF and 6 PFT
- Transfer of Alaska Public Safety Communication Services from DMVA -\$7,103.1 UGF, \$2,100.0 Fed, \$150.0 DGF, \$350.0 Other, and 24 PFT

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Ms. Howell concluded the presentation with the Violent Crimes Compensation Board appropriation on slide 16, reading as follows:

- Reduce Authority Due to Decreased Availability of Restorative Justice Funding for the Crime Victim Compensation Fund - (\$157.7) Other/Crime VCF [Victim Compensation Fund]

Representative Edgmon highlighted the need for as much law enforcement as possible in the Lake and Peninsula Borough and surrounding communities. He appreciated the commissioner coming on board and he was convinced that things would get better under the current leadership.

Co-Chair Merrick agreed.

Representative Josephson asked for the reason for the funding decrease shown on slide 16.

Ms. Howell answered the restorative justice account was a separate fund in the dividend fund. It was funded by dividends that would have gone to individuals who were otherwise ineligible due to criminal offenses. The number of ineligible individuals as well as the dividend amount had decreased, which subsequently resulted in a decrease in the amount of funding available to appropriate into the restorative justice account.

[2:59:43 PM](#)

Representative Josephson stated that in 2021, DOL had wanted to shift the cost of municipal prosecution of felonies to the municipalities. He had chaired the DOL subcommittee had resisted the change and it had not occurred. One could argue that a borough should not be required to pay for its own public safety. He asked how many trooper positions would be made available for other

duties if boroughs were required to have their own police forces.

Commissioner Cockrell answered that DPS had no authority over dictating what boroughs should and should not pay for. He thought the matter was a policy decision that should be made by the legislature and the administration. He stated that DPS's responsibility was to provide law enforcement.

Representative Josephson asked if Commissioner Cockrell was comfortable estimating the number of troopers covering the North Star Borough or the Mat-Su Borough, for example.

Commissioner Cockrell was not comfortable responding because he did not have enough information.

Co-Chair Merrick asked for the parameters for not receiving a Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD).

Ms. Howell answered that certain categories of individuals were statutorily ineligible for a PFD due to incarceration and other reasons. She would provide more information after the meeting.

Co-Chair Merrick had heard that incarcerated individuals would not receive dividends. She wondered if the dividend would become available immediately upon an incarcerated individual's release.

[3:02:38 PM](#)

Representative Thompson stated that ankle monitors were set up to keep people out of prison. He asked about the relationship between the Department of Justice, DOC, and AST regarding ankle monitors and asked which entity was responsible for tracking the monitors.

Commissioner Cockrell answered that DOC was responsible for ankle monitors. He noted that DPS would typically receive a notification if an individual violated the parameters of an ankle monitor and the individual would be arrested.

Representative Wool asked what kind of efforts were put into causation or prevention of crime in order to reduce the need for cops, courts, and corrections. He noted that all three were budget items that had been increasing in magnitude. He understood Alaska led the nation in domestic

violence, sexual assault, and gun violence and was number two in suicide rates. He asked what prevention efforts had been employed. He understood that suicide was not easily preventable through actions like introducing more VPSOs into villages and thought it might be a question better suited for a behavioral health expert. He asked if there had been efforts or discussions about prevention.

Mr. Morgan responded that there was not a macro view available currently. He explained that DPS now looked at a number of different causation factors and partnered with public health officials to share data on a core level, which had not happened in the past. He understood that DPS was not the entity responsible for examining causation, however DPS was the entity that held important data and information. The system had been more compartmentalized in the past, but the departments now freely shared information with other entities that investigated the causational factors of suicide and overdose deaths.

[3:07:21 PM](#)

Representative Wool appreciated the response and believed a holistic solution was needed in order to bring about change.

Commissioner Cockrell remarked that as a state, there needed to be improvement in the way mental health issues were handled. He noted that troopers were dealing with mental health crisis regularly and the crisis rates were only increasing over the years. There was a systemic mental health crisis in the state and likely in the nation and he did not think it had been properly addressed. He remarked that it would be helpful to have a place to take people experiencing mental health crises other than DOC.

Representative LeBon commented that some members lived in areas that enjoyed the service of local police departments, including himself. He understood that if a police department asked the city council and the mayor to add one position, there would be a debate, a budget adjustment, and upon approval, taxpayers would pay for the additional position. He thought there was a disconnect in the state, but he did not fault anyone for it. If DPS needed 100 additional troopers, the legislature needed to fund the positions. He would feel more comfortable funding the additional positions if he knew what the cost would be. He

did not think it was proper to approve and fill positions and worry about the money later. He encouraged members to build the money into the budget in the current cycle.

Commissioner Cockrell agreed that the strategy was risky. He stated the process would not happen overnight, but that it was a step forward. He hoped to be around long enough to see the improvements.

Co-Chair Merrick thanked the presenters.

HB 281 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 282 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

Co-Chair Merrick reviewed the schedule for the following day.

#

ADJOURNMENT

[3:13:02 PM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 3:13 p.m.