

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
March 29, 2022
9:02 a.m.

[9:02:13 AM](#)

CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Stedman called the Senate Finance Committee meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Click Bishop, Co-Chair
Senator Bert Stedman, Co-Chair
Senator Lyman Hoffman
Senator Donny Olson
Senator Bill Wielechowski

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Natasha von Imhof
Senator David Wilson

ALSO PRESENT

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

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

SUMMARY

PRESENTATION: DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY FY 23 BUDGET OVERVIEW

PRESENTATION: HIRING BONUSES and RETENTION INCENTIVES BY THE DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT and BUDGET

^PRESENTATION: DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY FY 23 BUDGET OVERVIEW

9:06:05 AM

Co-Chair Stedman stressed that masks would be worn in the room to protect the members from COVID-19. He asserted that the committee members needed to be healthy and present to complete work on the budget on time. He reminded the presenters to avoid the use of acronyms and to explain the presentation simply.

9:07:43 AM

KELLY HOWELL, SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, introduced herself. She noted that she had worked with co-chair staff to craft the presentation.

9:08:28 AM

JAMES COCKRELL, COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, introduced himself. He shared that the budgetary focus for the department was statutory requirements, departmental priorities, administrative priorities, rural support, and revitalizing the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program. He relayed that because the budget should meet the demands of the department, while exploring ways to better utilize resources and better communicate with citizens, there were budget requests for Tribal Liaisons for VPSO and troopers, as well as Victim Witness Coordinators for major areas of the state.

9:10:09 AM

Senator Hoffman recalled a specific case of public safety in his district from May 2020 and remarked that the people wanted closure on the issue. He said that survivors of the incident could not move on with their practical lives because of lack of information and communication from the department. He lamented that individuals in rural Alaska had very limited resources and deserved every opportunity to get closure without hitting a bureaucratic wall when dealing with the department. He wanted the issue look into and for help to be provided to the survivors so they could move on with their lives.

[9:13:04 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman asked that the information be provided to the committee.

[9:13:19 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell agreed to examine the situation. He said that it was a priority for the department to provide more support in rural Alaska.

[9:14:42 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman felt that the subject could be addressed at the appropriate time in the presentation.

[9:14:57 AM](#)

Ms. Howell discussed the presentation, "Department of Public Safety; FY2023 Budget Overview; Senate Finance Committee; March 29, 2022" (copy on file). She pointed to slide 2, "Department of Public Safety; FY2023 Budget Overview; Senate Finance Committee; March 29, 2022." She shared that the slide had been prepared by the Legislative Finance division (LFD) and provided a ten-year lookback for the department's operating budget. She said that the FY 23 budget request reflected a 15 percent increase over previous years. She mentioned that \$9.7 million of the increase was due to the transfer of the Alaska Public Safety Communication Services from the Department of Military and Veteran's Affairs (DMVA) to the Department of Public Safety (DPS). She said the majority of the budget was funded undesignated general funds (UGF) at 77 percent, followed by federal funds at 15 percent.

[9:15:58 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman asked for an explanation of the increase in the FY 20 management plan.

[9:16:09 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that the department had an increase in UGF from FY 19 to FY 20 due to the addition of several positions and an increase in federal funds. She thought that the increased federal funds could be associated with the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

[9:16:44 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman remarked that request had gone from \$161 million in FY 19 to \$212 million in FY 23.

[9:17:01 AM](#)

Ms. Howell agreed.

[9:17:06 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman hoped that the presentation would explain the growth within the agency. He did not suggest the growth was unwarranted but hoped for more background on the current request.

[9:17:23 AM](#)

Ms. Howell stressed that the growth between FY 20 and FY 23 had been from additional positions added in FY 21 combined with the federal funding. She stated that the department was recovering from prior budget reductions and was working to regrow the department to past levels.

[9:18:06 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman questioned the accuracy of that statement. He noted that UGF was flat at \$164 million from FY 13 through to FY 19. He wondered whether there were numbers indicating that the department had ever been at \$212 million.

[9:18:31 AM](#)

Ms. Howell clarified that the department was trying to regain prior levels as well as increase growth with the addition of new positions, new programs to bolster services to rural Alaska, and shifting some work from troopers to civilian staff within the department.

[9:19:13 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman clarified that there had been budget reductions in several agencies and the University, while there had been growth in the budgets for DPS and the Department of Corrections (DOC).

[9:19:43 AM](#)

Ms. Howell looked at slide 3, "Appropriations within Department of Public Safety." She related that the slide had been prepared by LFD and showed the department's allocations over the past 10 years. The top red line represented Alaska State Trooper appropriation and was the biggest portion of the budget at \$166.2 million or 66 percent. She relayed that the Statewide Support appropriation was 18 percent of the budget; followed by the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

[9:20:31 AM](#)

Ms. Howell addressed slide 4, "State Trooper Budgeted Position History." She said that between FY 16 and FY 19 the department lost over 40 trooper positions; the request for an additional 17 positions in FY 23 will result in a gain of 37 positions. She stated that the chart broke down the troopers between the Alaska Wildlife Division and the Alaska State Trooper Division. The total of the two divisions in FY 22 excluded 17 funded State Trooper Recruit positions, because the legislature had added funding for those positions in FY 21. She relayed that there were 402 positions between the two divisions combined.

[9:22:04 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman wondered how many of the 17 positions were off the road system.

[9:22:09 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that those positions were at the academy in Sitka and were placeholders for new recruits as they entered the training program. Once training was complete, they were transferred into a different position.

[9:22:35 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman asked how many of the 17 positions would be placed off the road system once they completed training.

[9:22:48 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell replied that once the student graduated from the academy, they went to one of three

places for training: Soldotna, Mat-Su Valley, or Fairbanks. After a two-year probationary period, they could request to be placed in rural Alaska. He said that there were 73 positions to serve Kotzebue to Kodiak, down to the Bristol Bay region.

[9:24:01 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman understood that the question would be addressed further in the presentation.

[9:24:27 AM](#)

Co-Chair Bishop queried the attrition rate at the academy.

[9:24:36 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell agreed to provide that information.

[9:24:54 AM](#)

Ms. Howell clarified that none of the numbers included in the 17 recruits. She pointed to slide 5, "State Trooper Job Class Series." The slide showed how the positions were allocated within each budget allocation, as well as the job class title and the division. She reiterated that the Alaska State Trooper Detachments allocation was the largest.

[9:26:25 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman wondered where the commissioner and deputy commissioner in the table on slide 5 would be located.

[9:26:39 AM](#)

Ms. Howell responded that the two positions would be budgeted in the Statewide Services allocation under the Commissioner's Office, as well as the two colonels that directed the division.

[9:26:57 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman understood that the slide contained the "worker bees" in the division.

[9:27:20 AM](#)

Ms. Howell agreed.

[9:27:23 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman wondered about the Statewide Drug and Alcohol Enforcement Unit. He noted the connection between crime in rural Alaska and the use of alcohol and drugs. He queried the accomplishments of the unit as the problem was persistent in rural areas of the state.

[9:28:11 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman thought the presenter could give a brief history of the matter and provide further written detail later. He thought that the unit had made some progress in Southeast Alaska in the previous years.

[9:28:32 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell directed committee attention to the department's annual Drug Report. He said that drug investigators were stationed throughout the state; 3 investigators were stationed in Bethel. He said that the department was engaged in drug seizures throughout the state including being members of several Task Forces.

[9:29:20 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman hoped for more detail broken down by region.

[9:29:23 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell replied in the affirmative.

[9:29:30 AM](#)

Ms. Howell discussed slide 6, "State Trooper Job Class." The slide showed the positions by allocation, vacant positions within each allocation, and where new PCNs were being requested. She relayed that FY 22 budgeted PCNs totaled 419; total vacant PCNs was 67. The overall vacancy rate was 16 percent. New PCN requests were as follows: Alaska State Trooper Detachments, 12; Aircraft Section, 2; Alaska Wildlife Troopers, 3.

[9:30:27 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman asked whether the vacancy number was normal for the department.

[9:30:42 AM](#)

LEON MORGAN, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, replied that the vacancy rate was high, but the department felt positive that positions would be filled.

[9:31:20 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman wondered about historical vacancy rates.

[9:31:40 AM](#)

Deputy Commissioner Morgan agreed to provide that information to the committee. He expressed hope to bring the vacancy rate into the single digits.

Co-Chair Stedman shared that there would always be a vacancy rate, generally 5 or 6 percent, a zero-vacancy rate did not exist, and that single digits were optimal.

[9:32:38 AM](#)

Co-Chair Bishop wondered whether the retention factors were increasing or decreasing. He wondered whether the state was losing trained staff to the Lower 48 states.

[9:33:02 AM](#)

Deputy Commissioner Morgan replied that improvements in the environment had helped with retention but burn out was still a problem with troopers and VPSOs.

[9:34:11 AM](#)

Senator Wielechowski spoke of bills currently cycling through the legislature to return to a defined benefit. He wondered whether a defined benefit would have an impact on recruitment and retention in his department.

[9:34:32 AM](#)

Deputy Commissioner Morgan replied that goo retirement packages were important. He said he could not comment on specific legislation.

[9:35:07 AM](#)

Ms. Howell displayed slide 7, "Trooper Vacancy Factor Information - Detachments Allocation." The slide illustrated the number positions by location, and broke FY 22 management plan down by budgeted PCNs, vacant PCNs, and actual vacancy rate. Figures for FY 23 included new position requests and gov FY 23 new PCN cost once filled. She noted that of the 242 positions, the most troopers were in Fairbanks. She said that there was a 12.4 vacancy rate within the detachments allocation, 12 new positions were requested with an estimated cost of \$3 million. She stated that the budgeted vacancy factor for the trooper detachment allocation was 6.9 percent, with a 12.4 vacancy rate there was excess personal services in the allocation. She said that the department had the ability to shift fund amongst the personal services line within the trooper appropriation.

[9:37:18 AM](#)

Co-Chair Bishop asked for a map of the coverage of areas in the state.

[9:37:41 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman noted that, of the twelve requested positions, ten were in Wasilla and Palmer. He wondered whether that was because those areas had the highest crime rate.

[9:38:08 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell replied that the positions were to provide more support for troopers currently stationed in those areas. He shared that the jurisdiction was immense, and more troopers were needed to respond to all the calls. He said that once those areas were settled, then more troopers could be placed in rural areas of the state. He lamented that lack of adequate housing for troopers in rural Alaska kept the department from placing troopers in those communities.

[9:39:07 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman remarked that housing had been built in Bethel over ten years ago. He argued that the Yukon

Kuskoquim Delta (YK Delta) was twice the size of the Palmer/Wasilla area and contained 56 villages, many of which did not have even a VPSO presence. He contended that the new request allocation should consider the statewide perspective and the need for additional troopers in the YK Delta.

[9:40:30 AM](#)

Senator Wielechowski wondered whether the department had received funding for rural trooper housing in FY 22.

[9:40:43 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman asked that the answer include rolling in of the federal money available

[9:41:04 AM](#)

Ms. Howell responded that she could get back to the committee on the issue of rural trooper housing. She said that any federal dollars were being managed by the Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development (DCCD). She said that communities that had had received funds were working with DCCD to overcome federal requirements for constructing housing. She said that the federal rules regarding environmental impacts was slowing the work.

[9:42:40 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman shared that the staff would reach out to DCCD for a written response to the issue.

[9:43:04 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman noted that U.S. Attorney General Barr has written a "scathing" report on the conditions and lack of services in rural Alaska. He said that Wasilla, Palmer, and Soldotna were not mentioned anywhere in the report.

[9:44:26 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell replied that he agreed that there were great needs in rural Alaska. He stressed that law enforcement presence in rural Alaska had been a problem since statehood. He assured the committee that the

department was working to address the problem. He reiterated that the biggest limitation facing the department was housing in rural Alaska. He said that criminal investigators had been assigned in Bethel and Nome. He recognized that the crime rates in rural Alaska were staggering. He said that a crime scene technician was being placed in Bethel.

[9:46:11 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman said that in the YK Delta the housing issue had been addressed by additional funds being put into the budget by administration, which led to bids on construction and the houses being built. He felt that the same thing could happen in Bristol Bay and Norton Sound. He felt that the problem and solution had already been identified and wondered why the problem was not being solved.

[9:47:17 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell replied that there were housing units in Kotzebue that were leased and the housing in Bethel was at capacity. He said that housing was needed in Saint Michaels, Emmonak, Hooper Bay, and Ambler. He stressed that troopers could not be placed in those areas without housing. He added that troopers should not be responding from the larger hubs because weather could be an issue, leaving VPSOs to hold the scene until troopers arrived. He said that stationing troopers in rural Alaska would cost money and could not happen without the support of the administration and the legislature.

[9:48:36 AM](#)

Senator Olson spoke of the department's response to a recent fire in his district and thanked the commissioner for his service to that community.

[9:49:02 AM](#)

Senator Wielechowski surmised that the report from LFD showed that the department reallocated \$325 thousand from rural trooper housing to a different area in the budget.

[9:49:30 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that was correct. She explained that the rural trooper housing allocation was funding that the department used to pay for rural trooper housing leases and received funding through rental payments made by troopers under their collective bargaining agreements. She said that transfer of funds out of that allocation into another allocation under the state trooper's appropriation was made to balance expenditures and revenue. She said that it was possible that the transfers would need to reoccur again in the coming fiscal year.

[9:50:14 AM](#)

Co-Chair Bishop requested that the department provide the committee with the ten-year strategic plan for trooper housing in rural Alaska.

[9:50:34 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell agreed to provide the information. He added several examples of the difficulty the department faced when trying to procure trooper housing in rural Alaska.

[9:51:31 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman reiterated that the budgeted vacancy factor was 6.9 percent, and the actual was 12 percent. He requested further clarification on how funds were handled to reflect the difference in percentage.

[9:51:34 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that the difference between the budgeted and the actual vacancy factors was approximately \$2.8 million and were personal services funds currently allocated to unfilled positions. The funds would be used for unanticipated responses to law enforcement expenses as well as position transfer expenses due to geographic differentials.

[9:53:11 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman spoke of budgeting challenges and wondered about funding for new positions. He struggled with the fact that there was no funding in place for the 12 additional positions.

[9:54:52 AM](#)

Ms. Howell responded that the 12 positions were currently in the budget with no funding. She relayed that full funding would be requested in a supplemental once the positions were filled.

[9:55:50 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman expressed distaste for supplemental budget requests. He wondered whether there was room in the vacancy factor to absorb the expense. He noted 30 unfilled but funded positions currently within the department.

[9:57:02 AM](#)

Ms. Howell thought that it would be challenging to absorb the expense if all the positions were filled. She said that if the vacancy rate remained the same the department could move money to cover the cost of the positions to the extent possible. She stressed that the goal was to get the vacancy rate reduced and the trooper positions filled.

Co-Chair Stedman asked about where the new troopers would be placed in the state. He thought there were areas in the state that could afford their own police department, which could free up resources for communities that could not afford law enforcement.

[9:58:41 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell stated that the department could not dictate where services were provided. He said that there were areas that had statutory and constitutional requirement for trooper placement. He recalled that in the past troopers had been moved from urban to rural areas of the state and the troopers had quit, due to overwork. He said that there had to be a consensus among policy makers to decide the best direction for the state. He offered an option of giving the department the ability to contract out like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) did in Whitehorse.

[10:00:48 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell concluded his remarks.

Co-Chair Stedman asked if the legislature made a policy call pertaining to affordability of contracting troopers - he wondered how many law enforcement officers that would make available for rural areas.

Commissioner Cockrell admitted that there was not an area of the state that DPS provided adequate protection for the public. He stressed that if the department was going to continue to provide support to the state, they would need more budgetary support from the legislature. He lamented that rural Alaska had been neglected for law enforcement since statehood.

[10:03:19 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman spoke of funding through property taxes and the equity issue that practice created in rural Alaska.

[10:04:08 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman asked about the issue of moving troopers from Kenai to rural Alaska. He said that when there were no troopers in rural Alaska - there was no law enforcement readily available. He thought that the idea of moving a few troopers from urban to rural areas was a good idea for the protection of rural Alaskans. He argued that all Alaskans deserved protection. He reminded the commissioner of his responsibility to protect all Alaskans.

[10:07:12 AM](#)

Ms. Howell pointed to slide 8, "FY 2023 Significant Operating Budget Requests." The slide listed appropriations/allocations, description of the request, the amount of requested funding, and the number of PCNs associated with each request:

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/Dispatch Services (new allocation)

Description

Add Funding for Dispatch Services Contract with Kenai Peninsula Borough

Funding

\$1,819.4 UGF

PCNs

0

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/AST Detachments

Description

Add Troopers in Anchorage (1), Tok (1), Palmer (5), Wasilla (5), and Public Safety Technicians in Juneau (1) and Soldotna (1)

Funding

\$0.0

PCNs

14 PFT

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/AST Detachments

Description

Expand AST In-Car Video Storage Services

Funding

\$631.5 UGF

PCNs

0

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/AST Detachments

Description

Add Full Funding for New FY2021 Filled Positions

Funding

\$631.0 UGF

PCNs

0

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/AST Detachments

Description

Funding to Establish Office Space in Togiak and Hooper Bay

Funding

\$200.0 UGF

PCNs

0

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/AST Detachments

Description

Add Positions to Address Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons

Funding

\$818.8 UGF

PCNs

7 PFT

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/AST Detachments

Description

Add Four Criminal Justice Technician Positions

Funding

\$404.4 UGF

PCNs

4 PFT

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/Alaska Bureau of Investigation

Description

Add Two Office Assistant Positions and Two Criminal Justice Technician Positions

Funding

\$395.5 UGF

PCNs

4 PFT

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/Alaska Bureau of Investigation

Description

Add Two Criminal Intelligence Analyst Positions in the Technical Crimes Unit Digital Forensics Lab

Funding

\$234.9 UGF

PCNs

2 PFT

She listed each request and provided a description and funding number. She emphasized that much of the work listed in the details was currently being done by troopers but could be done by civilians, which would free up troopers to respond public safety services.

[10:10:58 AM](#)

Senator Wielechowski understood that Kenai Peninsula was an organized borough that could pay for its own services. He surmised that Kenai wanted to charge the state \$1.8 million for troopers to provide public safety for the area.

[10:11:46 AM](#)

Deputy Commissioner Morgan replied in the affirmative.

[10:12:13 AM](#)

Senator Olson wondered how an organized borough with the tax base to fund its own public safety coverage would have such a large request. He wondered whether there were any alternatives to the request that would be less financially impactful to the state budget.

[10:12:48 AM](#)

Deputy Commissioner Morgan replied that there was no immediate alternative. He said that the conversation concerning consolidating trooper dispatch was an important one. He stated that there had been a plan in the past to have a facility in Southern Alaska, but due to legislative intent language, and the inability of the executive branch to institute a working group, the plan had been halted.

[10:13:53 AM](#)

Senator Olson remarked that if the borough was mandated to supply their own public safety, then what kept the department from pulling troopers from the area.

[10:14:37 AM](#)

Deputy Commissioner Morgan replied that pulling troopers from the area would be catastrophic to the people in the area.

[10:15:34 AM](#)

Senator Olson contended that in the absence of state troopers, Kenai could rely on law enforcement within the municipality.

Deputy Commissioner Morgan replied in the affirmative.

[10:15:55 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman thought that other organized boroughs in the state would follow suit with Kenai and demand state funded troopers even though they could afford to provide their own law enforcement. He wondered how the department would say no to one borough and yes to another. He pointed out that there were communities in the state that had no

public safety services at all while the department considered funding over \$1 million in dispatch services for Kenai. He argued that this was wrong public policy, and that the department should revisit the request.

[10:17:25 AM](#)

Senator Olson stressed that the legislature should send the message, by not honoring the Kenai request, that public safety dollars should be spread more equitably throughout the state.

[10:18:40 AM](#)

Ms. Howell addressed slide 9, "Trooper Vacancy Factor Information - Alaska Wildlife Troopers Allocation" The slide showed the top 6 locations where positions were currently based, the number of vacancies in those areas, and the actual vacancy rate. The department had requested three positions: Yakutat (1), Saint Mary's (1), and Galena (1). She said that the wildlife troopers were under their budgeted vacancy factor at 6.4 percent.

[10:19:16 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman wondered how the requested positions would be funded.

[10:19:28 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that that department had the discretion to transfer funds in the personal services line from other allocations within the state trooper appropriation. She said should the department need those funds to cover the position costs, the department would attempt to absorb the costs through transfers from other allocations.

[10:19:54 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman wondered whether the ability to move funds around to fund new positions not previously budgeted for meant that there was too much "slop" in the budget. He added that, conversely, there was the issue of unwelcome supplemental requests.

[10:20:17 AM](#)

Ms. Howell looked at slide 10, "FY 2023 Significant Operating Budget Requests." The slide detailed the FY 23 request for the Alaska Wildlife Trooper Division:

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/Alaska Wildlife Troopers

Description

Add Alaska Wildlife Trooper Positions in St. Mary's (1), Galena (1), and Yakutat (1)

Funding

\$0.0

PCNs

3 PFT

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/Alaska Wildlife Troopers

Description

Add Funding for Public Safety Technician Time Status Change

Funding

\$369.4 UGF

PCNs

6 PFT

(6) PPT

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/Alaska Wildlife Troopers
Aircraft Section

Description

Add Two State Trooper Tactical Flight Officers and One Aircraft Pilot

Funding

\$614.2 UGF

PCNs

3 PFT

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/Alaska Wildlife Troopers
Aircraft Section

Description

Add Funding for Aircraft Maintenance and Repairs

Funding

\$1,800.0 UGF

PCNs

0

Appropriation/Allocation

Alaska State Troopers/Alaska Wildlife Troopers Marine Enforcement

Description

Add Funding for Large and Medium Vessel Fuel and Parts

Funding

\$500.0 UGF -

PCNs

0

[10:21:01 AM](#)

Co-Chair Bishop queried the job description of a "Tactical Flight Officer".

[10:21:11 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell replied that the Tactical Fight Officer was a commissioned Alaska State Trooper position that provided watch for operations, specifically surveillance camera operations. The position lessened the need to pull support resources from patrol.

[10:22:07 AM](#)

Co-Chair Bishop asked about the \$1,800.0 request for aircraft funding and wondered whether it was connected to the Capital Budget request for two potential aircraft.

[10:22:30 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that the \$1.8 million request was to cover cost increases for fuel and parts, as well as increased in flight hours for existing aircraft. The money will also fund addition training for pilots.

[10:22:59 AM](#)

Co-Chair Bishop understood that the capital request was tied to the operating request.

[10:23:04 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman wondered where in the state the part-time public safety technician positions would be located.

[10:23:24 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that she would get back to the committee with the information.

[10:24:21 AM](#)

Senator Olson asked about a Galena Wildlife Trooper named Brad Stratton.

[10:24:42 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell replied that he was following up on the matter. He said that there was not a trooper assigned to Galena and someone from Anchorage was usually sent there.

[10:24:59 AM](#)

Ms. Howell pointed to slide 11, "Village Public Safety Officer Program." She relayed that the slide captured the VPSO funding and filled positions, by fiscal year. She shared that the blue part of the graph reflected the total appropriations for the VPSO program, the red bars showed the grants allocated out to the 10 regional corporations, the green lined showed the VPSO positions filled as of December 31st of each fiscal year. She said that the FY 23 request included funding to support up to 65 VPSOs, 10 more that was currently funded.

[10:26:27 AM](#)

Ms. Howell addressed slide 12, "VPSO / Trooper Hourly Rate Comparison." She stressed that it was challenging to make comparisons between the two job classes. She noted that VPSO were not employees of the department or the state, rather they were the grantees for which the department provided funding. She stated that the current VPSO starting hourly rate was \$30.79 per hour. She noted that the FY 23 request would bring that hourly rate to \$32.79 per hour. She relayed that the trooper base hourly rate was \$36.04, increasing with geographic differentials established under collective bargaining agreements.

[10:27:39 AM](#)

Senator Hoffman remarked that in the past it had been noted that troopers would relocate to rural areas to log 3 to 5 high differential years for retirement purposes. He wondered whether the department monitored such actions to control the retirement budget.

[10:28:22 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell replied that there was a time when Tier 1 and Tier 2 troopers transferred to rural Alaska to get their high 3 or high 5 years. He said that currently most of the troopers in rural Alaska were young and not near retirement age. He shared that there was a bid system in place that would place troopers closer to retirement age in rural areas based on seniority. He did not consider the issue to be a current problem.

[10:29:36 AM](#)

Ms. Howell looked at slide 13, "FY 2023 Significant Operating Budget Requests." The slide reflected the requests for the VPSO appropriation:

Appropriation/Allocation

Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) Program/VPSO Program

Description

Add a Tribal Liaison Position

Funding

\$125.5 UGF

PCNs

1 PFT

Appropriation/Allocation

VPSO Program/VPSO Program

Description

Add Funding for Ten Village Public Safety Officers

Funding

\$2,328.0 UGF

PCNs

0

Appropriation/Allocation

VPSO Program/VPSO Program

Description

Village Public Safety Officer 5% Salary Increase

Funding

\$671.6 UGF
PCNs
0

[10:30:26 AM](#)

Senator Olson asked whether any of the increases were part of the VPSO working group recommendations.

[10:30:37 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that the salary increases were due to a recommendation from the working group. She added that the department's commissioner had prioritized the Tribal liaison position to promote the department's image and service to rural Alaska.

Senator Olson was in favor of the Tribal liaison position.

[10:31:16 AM](#)

Co-Chair Bishop wondered whether the Tribal liaison position would be filled by a person with working knowledge of rural Alaska and the VPSO program.

[10:31:31 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell said that it was his intent that the person be knowledgeable of the Tribes throughout the state. He said that ultimately, he would like to establish a Tribal Affairs Office within the department. He admitted that the department had done poorly in the past communicating with Tribes when allocating resources to rural Alaska.

[10:32:57 AM](#)

AT EASE

[10:35:28 AM](#)

RECONVENED

[10:35:36 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman announced that the meeting would continue in the afternoon to discuss bonuses and retention.

[10:36:12 AM](#)

Ms. Howell pointed to slide 14, "CDVSA FY 2021 - FY 2024 Available Grant Funding." The slide showed the FY 21 through FY 24 available grant funding that the Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault had awarded to different programs.

Ms. Howell looked at slide 15, "CDVSA FY 2021 - FY 2024 Available Grant Funding." The graph showed the increase in federal funding received for each program and the subsequent drop in those funds. She said that in FY 22 there had been a significant drop in Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funds received by the council. She stated that the department requested, and received, funding through the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (CSLFRF) to backfill the amount of funding lost through VOCA, which enabled CDVSA to keep programs as whole as possible.

[10:38:21 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman asked the presenters to limit the use of acronyms.

Ms. Howell stated that Diane Casto, Executive Director, Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Department of Public Safety was available for questions. She related that the last two bars on the graph showed the projected amounts for FY 23 and FY 24 that the council would be able to award to programs. She noted the \$3.5 million request for receipt authority for the CSLFRF fund in FY 23. She pointed to the note at the bottom of the slide:

\$5,000.0 in congressionally directed spending expected before October 2022

[10:40:05 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman wondered whether other federal monies or federal appropriation bills could pass that would help to fund the programs.

[10:40:09 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that a federal VOCA fix bill had been signed and would help to recapitalize the VOCA fund. She lamented that the timeline for seeing increased federal funding would be quite long.

[10:40:47 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman warned that the federal coronavirus funding would wane. He wondered how the state should prepare for the transition away from the federal coronavirus dollars and back to running the programs on a more normal budget.

[10:41:41 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that one action would be to gradually reduce the amount in awards distributed by the council. She deferred to Ms. Casto.

[10:42:01 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman invited Ms. Casto to the table.

[10:42:31 AM](#)

DIANNE CASTO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COUNCIL ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT, stated that the council had struggled with the questions. The decrease in VOCA funds had been noted. She stressed that although it seemed that programs had been built using limited VOCA funds - the programs were critical for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. She pointed to the FY 21 and FY 22 funding where funding had been reduced by \$1 million, She stated that once the council knew that federal funding would be reduced it reduced grant awards by 5 percent. She said that the administration had chosen to give back the \$1 million through the federal Coronavirus dollars, which meant that all grantees received their grants but not through the council. She recognized that on an economic level the funds needed to be reduced but on a humanitarian level these services were vital for survivors. She shared that the fund that paid out awards under VOCA was diminished and would not rebound for several years. She relayed that the amount of federal dollars received in 2018 was an anomaly.

[10:46:25 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman thought that the committee was interested in not building a budget on \$101/bbl. He said that a mechanism would be established to deal with excess revenue. He hoped that the council did not expect the budget would

be crafted using \$101/bbl oil. He warned against relying on the state to supplant federal dollars.

[10:47:34 AM](#)

Co-Chair Bishop noted the three targeted program areas. He wondered how much money was spent on prevention and education in the state, citing the "Choose Respect" campaign from previous years.

[10:48:28 AM](#)

Ms. Casto understood the question and agreed that there should be a balance between services for victims and education and prevention. She pointed to the designated general fund (DGF) line on the slide. She relayed that the passage of SB 91 in 2017 had allowed the council \$2 million specifically for prevention efforts. She said that the federal dollars could be used for prevention services but most of the fund went to victim's services.

[10:49:58 AM](#)

Co-Chair Bishop agreed.

[10:50:13 AM](#)

Ms. Howell discussed slide 16, "FY 2023 Significant Operating Budget Requests." The slide provided the operating request for the CDVSA:

Appropriation/Allocation

Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
(CDVSA)/CDVSA

Description

Add One-Time Funding for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Victim Services Grants

Funding

\$3,500.0 Fed

PCNs

0

Appropriation/Allocation

CDVSA/CDVSA

Description

Add Two Program Coordinator Positions to Manage Victim Services and Perpetrator Intervention Programs

Funding

\$93.2 Fed

\$193.2 UGF

PCNs

2 PFT

Appropriation/Allocation

CDVSA/CDVSA

Description

One-Time Funding for Alaska Family Justice Center Model

Study

Funding

\$500.0 UGF

PCNs

0

[10:51:09 AM](#)

Senator Wielechowski understood that the other body had cut the funding for the \$500,000 request to \$200,000. He wondered whether the department would be able to conduct the study with the deduced funds.

[10:51:20 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that that DPS did not have a robust enough estimate of the true cost. She shared that the other body had reduced the request and reallocated the \$300,000 for grants. She said that the guidance from the other body was that if additional funding was needed for the study the department could transfer the money back.

[10:51:59 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman noted that the proposed FY 23 budget listed 233 additional employees across the state, 229 minus the Court System and the Legislature. He expressed concern about adding employees in a budget built on too high of an oil price.

[10:52:57 AM](#)

Ms. Howell pointed to slide 17, "FY2022 Supplemental Capital Budget Request (All \$ in Thousands)":

- Aircraft Purchase and Replacement, \$6,000.0 UGF

- AST Unmanned Aerial System, \$450.0 UGF
- AWT Medium-Class Vessel Replacement, \$1,800.0 UGF
- Body Worn Camera Initiative, \$4,524.3 UGF
- Mobile and Handheld Radio Replacement, \$3,728.3 UGF
- VPSO Law Enforcement Program Support, \$2,980.0 UGF

[10:53:31 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman wondered whether any of the requests were in previous capital budgets and subsequently vetoed by the governor. He contended that there had been numerous items in the past that had been included in the Capital Budget at the administration's request and then vetoed by the governor.

[10:53:54 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that she did not know if any of the requests had been previously vetoed. She offered to provide the information to the committee.

[10:54:08 AM](#)

Senator Olson asked for an example of the last bullet point on the slide, "VPSO Law Enforcement Program Support".

[10:54:27 AM](#)

Ms. Howell replied that the department had consulted with the ten VPSO grantee employers to assess their needs. The request would cover a building heating system in Angoon, and other housing repairs and refurbishments. She listed a variety of needs that had been requested.

[10:55:20 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman remarked that the request was a supplemental request from FY 22 and there were ample funds being considered in the FY 23 budget. He said that the committee would consider funding the items in the FY 23 budget and did not believe that the items should be in the supplemental request.

[10:56:20 AM](#)

Ms. Howell looked at slide 18, "FY2023 Capital Budget Request (All \$ in Thousands)":

- Law Enforcement Off Highway Vehicle Replacement, \$750.0 UGF
- Marine Fisheries Patrol Improvements, \$1,200.0 Fed

[10:57:02 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman hoped that the department had fuel calculations in their budget to make sure that the troopers had the ability to use their fleet to do enforcement and patrol of fisheries and game hunting. He stressed that the oil price had change since the budget had been crafted.

[10:57:28 AM](#)

Commissioner Cockrell replied that that there was major concern with the vessel and aircraft fuel prices forcing the department to scale back its operations.

[10:57:51 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman said that the commissioner should let the committee know what a reasonable request would be. He worried about the trooper's ability to respond and said that there was no interest in having troopers inactive because of the cost of gasoline. He reiterated that the department should ask for what they needed regarding funding for vessel and aircraft fuel.

Co-Chair Bishop thanked the department for their work on catching an arsonist in Fairbanks.

^PRESENTATION: HIRING BONUSES and RETENTION INCENTIVES BY THE DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT and BUDGET

[10:58:40 AM](#)

Co-Chair Stedman stated that the presentation would be heard that afternoon.

[11:00:03 AM](#)

RECESSED

#

ADJOURNMENT

11:00:03 AM

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.