

HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE  
February 17, 2025  
1:34 p.m.

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CALL TO ORDER

Co-Chair Josephson called the House Finance Committee meeting to order at 1:34 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Neal Foster, Co-Chair  
Representative Andy Josephson, Co-Chair  
Representative Calvin Schrage, Co-Chair  
Representative Jamie Allard  
Representative Jeremy Bynum  
Representative Alyse Galvin  
Representative Sara Hannan  
Representative Nellie Unangiq Jimmie  
Representative DeLena Johnson  
Representative Will Stapp  
Representative Frank Tomaszewski

MEMBERS ABSENT

None

ALSO PRESENT

James Cockrell, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety; Dianna Thornton, Administrative Services Director, Department of Public Safety; Leon Morgan, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Public Safety; Mary Beth Gagnon, Executive Director, Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault; April Wilkerson, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Corrections; Kevin Worley, Administrative Services Director, Department of Corrections.

PRESENT VIA TELECONFERENCE

Jake Wyckoff, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Corrections; Travis Welch, Director, Division of Health and Rehab Services, Department of Corrections.

SUMMARY

HB 53        APPROP: OPERATING BUDGET; CAP; SUPP

HB 53 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 55        APPROP: MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET

HB 55 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

OVERVIEW: FY 26 BUDGET BY THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

OVERVIEW: FY 26 BUDGET BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Co-Chair Josephson reviewed the meeting agenda.

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#hb55

HOUSE BILL NO. 53

"An Act making appropriations for the operating and loan program expenses of state government and for certain programs; capitalizing funds; amending appropriations; making supplemental appropriations; making reappropriations; 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. 55

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

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^OVERVIEW: FY 26 BUDGET BY THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

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JAMES COCKRELL, COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, offered introductory remarks related to public safety in Alaska. He relayed that the mission of the department could not be carried out without the support of the legislature.

Commissioner Cockrell thanked the committee. He felt that the Department of Public Safety (DPS) was heading in a good direction and made general comments regarding the budget as reflected in the PowerPoint.

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DIANNA THORNTON, ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, introduced a PowerPoint presentation titled "Department of Public Safety FY2026 Budget Overview," dated February 17, 2025 (copy on file). She addressed Slide 2 that listed the department's mission and key objectives:

Mission: To ensure public safety and to enforce fish and wildlife laws

Key Objectives:

- Recruitment, Retention & Wellness
- Rural Alaska Law Enforcement & Safety
- Establish Parks Highway North Trooper Post
- Purchase Long Range Response Aircraft
- Illicit Drug and Child Abuse Investigations
- Fisheries and Wildlife Resource Protection

Statewide Impact:

- Strengthen workforce resilience
- Expand safety in rural communities
- Improve Parks Highway patrol
- Enhance remote emergency response
- Target drug trafficking and child abuse
- Protect Alaskans, our resources, and ecosystems statewide

Ms. Thornton turned to Slide 3 titled "highlights in FY 2024:"

Fire and Life Safety  
Prioritized fire safety inspections and education in rural Alaska to prevent fire-related deaths, enhancing community safety.

Alaska State Troopers  
The Alaska State Troopers coordinated and responded to 598 search and rescue events, demonstrating their

critical role in ensuring public safety across Alaska's vast and challenging terrains.

#### Alaska Wildlife Troopers

The Alaska Wildlife Troopers protected Alaska's multi-billion-dollar fish and wildlife resources from illegal harvest through enforcement and education across urban and rural areas, benefiting various user groups.

#### Integrated Victim Assistance

The Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault held the final meeting of the current Pathways Statewide Strategic Plan, focusing on identifying future prevention targets and forming new goals and initiatives to be integrated into upcoming Requests for Proposals.

#### Village Public Safety Operations

The Division grew the number of Village Public Safety Officers working in rural Alaska, strengthening law enforcement presence and community safety in these areas.

#### Alaska Police Standards Council

The Council sponsored 712 officers across 48 advanced and in-service training events, totaling 23,298 hours of training. This included utilizing Mental Health Trust Authority Authorized Receipt grant funds to sponsor 2,103 officers in six training events, delivering 10,334 officer hours of training.

She moved to Slide 4 titled Department Appropriation Structure:"

#### Fire and Life Safety

- State Fire Marshall
- Life Safety Inspection Bureau
- Plan Review Bureau
- Bureau of Fire Accreditation, Standards, and Training
- Alaska Fire Standards Council

#### Alaska State Troopers

- Four detachments
- Drug/alcohol enforcement
- Dispatch services
- Search and rescue

- Alaska Bureau of Investigation
- Alaska Wildlife Troopers
- Marine enforcement
- Aircraft section
- Prisoner transport

Integrated Victim Assistance

- Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
- Violent Crimes Compensation Board
- Victim Navigator Unit
- Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Training Unit
- Missing Persons Clearinghouse
- Crime Lab

Statewide Support

- Commissioner's Office
- Division of Administrative Services
- Division of Statewide Services
- Office of Professional Standards
- Training Academy
- Public Information Office

Village Public Safety Operations

- Certification, training and standards
- Ten regional grantees partnered with 156 communities
- Rural Alaska public safety: community policing, search and rescue operations, emergency medical response, fire prevention and suppression

Alaska Police Standards Council

- Certification and de-certification of police officers
- Misconduct and disqualification investigations
- Develop and maintain police officer training and training requirements

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Ms. Thornton examined Slide 5 titled "Historical Budget by Funding Source FY2020 - FY2026:"

Between FY2025 Enacted and FY2026 Governor's Budget:

- \$20,889.4 or 6.01% increase in Unrestricted General Funds (UGF)
- \$11,388.6 or 3.28% is State employee salary increases, \$185.9 in federal funds

- \$321.8 net reduction in Designated General Funds (DGF)
- \$9,500.8 or 2.74% in UGF is initiatives detailed in this presentation

Ms. Thornton pointed to the graph and noted that there were two increments from prior years she drew attention to. The first was in FY 2021, when the Violent Crimes Compensation Board (VCCB) was added to the DPS's mission adding 5 staff and an increment of \$2.5 million. The second was in FY 2023, when the Alaska Public Safety Communications Services was transferred to DPS from the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs (DMV) at a cost of \$9.7 million adding 24 positions.

Co-Chair Josephson asked what source the reduction in DGF was. Ms. Thornton answered that it was reduced from the Recidivism Reduction Fund from the marijuana tax revenue.

Representative Stapp noted the substantial growth in DPS's spending. He asked if there was growth in the encounter rate with state troopers. Commissioner Cockrell responded that over the past four years there was small growth in the number of Alaska State Troopers (AST). He reported that in the prior year there were 70 vacancies and currently ASTs had 55 vacancies. If the current 22 class members pass, the rate would decrease to 31 vacancies, which had not been seen in a couple of decades. He stated that recruitment efforts seemed to be working but the challenge was to retain them. Retention depended on factors like trooper support, equipment, and housing issues in rural Alaska.

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Representative Stapp stated that the department had found a way to bridge the vacancy crisis. He asked about some of the recruitment efforts the department had done to alleviate the vacancy issue. Commissioner Cockrell answered that the department was focused on hiring troopers and professional staff. The department had decreased the processing timeline. He discussed "early hiring efforts" that included candidates spending time on investigations and patrol prior to academy attendance that decreased dropout rates. Focus on Alaska hires and employing a professional recruiter were additional efforts. He discussed other efforts like multiple location recruitment,

reclassification of vacant positions, and meeting weekly on recruitment efforts. He ascertained that the number of trooper vacancies had decreased substantially and DPS was currently doing really well. He believed that the trooper pay was good and mentioned instituting a responsive wellness program that included a counselor. In addition, troopers received upgraded equipment. The funding climate in the past five years had changed in a good way for the department. He elaborated that the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program was strong and much improved over prior years. There was a 76 percent increase in drug seizures: primarily fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine. He discussed methods to impede the influx of drugs into rural areas. The state was leading the country in how it handled Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) and had made huge gains in several years.

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Co-Chair Josephson summarized that he spoke a lot about encounter, which was related to the original question.

Representative Johnson appreciated the 2025 Key Objectives handout in members' packets (copy on file). She referenced the federal funding line on the chart on slide 5 that had increased significantly over the prior several years. She was concerned about what happened if the funding decreased. She asked what kind of federal revenue or funding stream he expected in the future and if the increase was due to trooper housing. Commissioner Cockrell responded that DPS did not rely heavily on federal funding and noted that there was an influx of federal funds for housing. He reminded the committee that the DPS budget had increased because it had been dramatically decreased in 2018 and 2019, which created backlogs in all functions. He stressed that the increased state investment had saved Alaska lives.

Ms. Thornton answered that there was about \$59 million of federal authority for federal grants awarded to the department. She delineated that the funding was for crime interdiction teams supporting drug enforcement with a minimal amount for positions. Much of the grant money was pass through funding to other law enforcement agencies through the United States (U.S.) Department of Justice. Representative Johnson asked the department to highlight federal funding throughout the presentation. She cautioned about situations where the legislature would have to

backfill with other funds once the federal funding was eliminated.

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Representative Allard thought every department could take note of the information on the slides. She believed that the appropriation and budget information was well presented. She believed that the department had improved recruitment without lowering its standards. She hoped the department would reach out to the military. She suggested that the department make a recruitment video advertisement about "it being cool to be a trooper." She inquired about efforts to recruit from exiting military. Commissioner Cockrell answered that the department recruited heavily for military hire.

LEON MORGAN, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, replied that DPS

began the military hiring process up to one year before a candidate exited the military and delayed their entry into the academy. The strategy was implemented roughly 4 years ago and was successful.

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Representative Galvin cited the "Other" funding category on slide 5. She pointed to FY 2020 and wondered why the actuals were significantly higher than the enacted. She wanted more information in general on the Other category. Ms. Thornton did not have the information on hand regarding the actuals and offered to follow up. Ms. Thornton answered that other funding was primarily interagency receipts, Mental Health Trust Authority Authorized Receipts (MHTAAR) funding, providing funds to the Alaska Police Standards Council, ASTs, statutorily designated funds for items like fire life safety regulations on fire standards, Restorative Justice Funding from incarcerated Permanent Fund Dividend recipients, and VCCB funding for victims.

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Representative Hannan speculated that the other funding in 2020 was likely due to COVID funding. She requested DPS show the committee its promotional videos in the future. Commissioner Cockrell replied in the affirmative. He interjected that he did not find the \$15 thousand to \$30

thousand trooper bonus program productive and eliminated it. He believed that there were better ways to spend money on recruitment.

Representative Allard referenced bonuses. She acknowledged that sometimes in the military, bonuses were spread out over years to offer incentives to stay longer. Commissioner Cockrell appreciated the suggestion.

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Ms. Thornton briefly highlighted Slide 6 titled "FY2026 Budget by Funding Source, \$347,333.1 (\$ in thousands):"

Federal

- US Department of Justice
- Office for Victims of Crime
- Bureau of Justice Assistance
- Community Oriented Policing Services
- Bureau of Justice Statistics
- Department of Homeland Security
- Federal Emergency Management Agency

Other

- Interagency Receipts
- Capital Improvement Project
- Mental Health Trust Authority
- Crime Victim Compensation Fund

Designated General Funds

- General Fund Program Receipts
- Recidivism Reduction Fund

Ms. Thornton turned to the pie charts on Slide 7 titled "FY 2026 Budget Breakdown by Appropriation and Line Item." She pointed to the left pie chart reflecting the bulk of the funding going to the Alaska State and Wildlife Troopers, \$216,432.2 ,62%; Statewide Support \$59,244.3, 17%; and with the remaining distributed among fire and life safety, Village Public Safety Operations, Integrated Victim Assistance, and the Alaska Police Standards Council. The pie chart on the right depicted each expenditure account with Personal Services \$199,172.0 , 57% being the bulk of the funding.

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Ms. Thornton advanced to slide 8 titled "Alaska State Troopers FY 2026 UGF \$194,369.2:"

Contribution to the Overall Department Mission:  
Preserve public peace; protect life, property, and wildlife resources.

Staff: 701 permanent full-time positions, 12 part-time positions, 34 non-permanent positions.

Core Services:

- Provide statewide law enforcement, ensuring public safety in both urban and remote communities.
- Enforce fish and wildlife laws to protect Alaska's natural resources through patrols, investigations, and public education.
- Investigate major crimes, including homicides and sexual assaults, and combat drug trafficking to uphold public safety.

Ms. Thornton addressed Slide 9 titled "AST: Detachments FY2026 UGF \$4,887.7:"

\$2,348.0 State Trooper and Wildlife Trooper overtime

\$65.0 Crime scene van  
\$500.0 for duty gear

\$489.1 One-time increment for Talkeetna post vehicles and equipment

\$1,485.6 Re-Open Talkeetna post:  
Five positions: one Sergeant, three Troopers, one criminal justice technician

Representative Stapp noticed that over the past couple of years the legislature had put resources into the Talkeetna Post. He asked if they were looking at reopening posts in rural Alaska. Commissioner Cockrell replied that he viewed the situation as a package when distributing resources in certain areas of the state. He discussed the reasons to reopen the Talkeetna Post. He added that the prior administration had closed 12 posts. He informed the committee that in Bethel he posted 3 investigators focusing

on child and adult sexual assault through a pilot program and was planning to do the same in the Northwest Arctic Borough. He stated that there was not a day he did not look at putting troopers somewhere else but there were a finite number of troopers to go around. He was attempting to put more VPSOs and troopers in rural Alaska. He related that the rural areas were looking for public safety equity and he was focused on rural communities. He continued to discuss the serious public safety issues that prompted the Talkeetna Post re-opening.

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Representative Hannan asked that of the 12 posts that had been closed in 2016, what was the plan for re-opening all of them. She discussed issues in Haines that wanted its AST post to reopen. Commissioner Cockrell reiterated the reasons the Talkeetna post was reopened like the 2.5 thousand service call each year and the logistical challenges to serve the areas from either Anchorage or the Matsu. Representative Hannan referenced the overtime increment on slide 9 and asked what percent of the overall increment it represented. She asked if there was a supplemental request. Ms. Thornton answered that she had reviewed the actual average per trooper overtime that amounted to 300 hours. The calculation was more realistic and represented the budget shortfall in personal services.

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Co-Chair Josephson asked how many boroughs had their own public safety officers. He wondered whether it was only the North Slope Borough. Commissioner Cockrell would follow up.

Mr. Morgan replied that he knew of three boroughs: Haines, Lake and Peninsula, and North Slope Boroughs.

Representative Jimmie asked why it would be important to have Wildlife Troopers at the Talkeetna post. Commissioner Cockrell answered that it was necessary due to the large amount of resource users and activity in the area. In addition, Wildlife Troopers could stand-in for an ASTs, and they were the experts in search and rescue. Representative Jimmie thought the department would prioritize public safety over a wildlife trooper posting. Commissioner Cockrell reiterated that they were also ASTs and could support state troopers. The department had 90 wildlife

troopers to enforce all the state's fish and game laws. Representative Jimmie asked if the department would rather have one less AST and one additional Wildlife Trooper. Commissioner Cockrell reiterated his answer regarding Wildlife Troopers dual roles.

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Representative Galvin asked about the \$2.3 million for overtime. She wondered if there would be less overtime funding in the future due to the recruitment efforts increasing the trooper ranks. Ms. Thornton responded that the department had been using a faulty calculation for instances of overtime. She noted the reasons for overtime and did not anticipating a reduction in overtime due to the increased service areas.

Representative Galvin deduced that more PCNs would cause less need for overtime. She asked for comment. Mr. Morgan answered that even with the increase in staff, Alaska had the lowest staffed state police agency in the country by any metric. The average was one trooper per 1 thousand population. She emphasized that the overtime pressure was a reality and was necessary.

Co-Chair Josephson asked the department to briefly continue.

Ms. Thornton moved to slide 10 titled "AST Dispatch AST: Dispatch FY2026 UGF \$123.8:"

Provide 24/7 emergency and non-emergency dispatch services, including 9 1 1 call handling, incident data entry, and law enforcement database management to support public safety operations

Ms. Thornton discussed Slide 11 titled "AST: Alaska Bureau of Investigations FY2026 UGF \$1,395.5:"

\$1,075.5 and \$270.0 one-time increment for three Child Sexual Abuse Material Investigators in Northwest Arctic Borough

\$50.0 unidentified human remains pilot project

Ms. Thornton reviewed Slide 12 titled "AST: Aircraft Section FY2026 UGF \$400.0:"

\$400.0 Increase for fuel and aircraft supplies

Over the last five years, Jet A fuel has increased 46.6%, and Avgas increased 51.8%

Operational Impact = Less proactive law enforcement presence such as reduced patrols and village visits

Ms. Thornton reviewed Slide 13 titled "AST: Alaska Wildlife Troopers FY2026 UGF \$729.9:"

\$323.0 Re-Open Talkeetna post One Wildlife Trooper

\$106.9 One-time increment for Talkeetna post vehicles and equipment

\$300.0 For duty gear

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Ms. Thornton presented slide 14 titled "Integrated Victim Assistance FY 2026 Budget \$36,842.9:"

Contribution to the Overall Department Mission:

To provide victim-centered responses, enhanced services, and training that are vital to the safety, stability, and healing of crime victims/survivors and family members. To uphold victims' rights, are culturally responsive and ultimately lead to enhanced public safety and community trust. Staff: 29 permanent full-time positions.

Core Services:

- Provides financial assistance, emergency shelter, and advocacy for victims of violent crimes, domestic violence, and sexual assault.

- Fund community-based prevention programs and law enforcement training to improve victim services statewide.

FY2024 Accomplishments:

A \$3.7M increase approved by the Legislature in FY2024 offset declining federal funds, ensuring continued victim support and prevention programs across Alaska.

FY2026 adjustments:

- \$87.0 in UGF to replace a portion of Restorative Justice Funds to Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA)
- \$387.1 reduction in Restorative Justice Funds for CDVSA (DGF)
- \$361.6 reduction in Permanent Fund Dividend Criminal Fund for the Violent Crimes Compensation Board (Other Funds)

Ms. Thornton corrected a bullet point on the slide and noted it should read \$387,100 reduction from the Recidivism Reduction Funds.

Co-Chair Josephson asked if Child Advocacy Centers (CDC) were funded in the governor's budget. Ms. Thornton deferred the answer to Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA).

MARY BETH GAGNON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COUNCIL ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT, answered that the Child Advocacy Centers were fully but flat funded (through the Victim of Crimes Act) through FY 26. She noted that the Department of Family and Community Services (DFCS) primarily housed CDCs and the CDC budget cuts were happening in DFCS. She directed funding cut questions to DFCS.

Representative Johnson asked about the Restorative Justice Account decrease. Ms. Thornton responded that the amount was provided to DPS by the Department of Revenue (DOR) and was based on the number of individuals that were eligible for the PFD. She did not have the exact formula and would follow up.

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Ms. Thornton moved to slide 15 titled "Village Public Safety Operations FY2026 UGF \$1,215.2:"

Contribution to the Overall Department Mission:  
Preserve public peace, protect life and property in rural villages, and provide public safety outreach to

communities through various community policing programs.

Staff: Five permanent full-time positions, 85 grant funded VPSO positions.

Core Services:

- Administer and oversee VPSO program grant agreements to ensure fiscal accountability.
- Provide VPSO certification and ongoing training in law enforcement, fire suppression, and emergency medical care.
- Collaborate with the Alaska State Trooper divisions to support VPSOs and align with public safety objectives.
- Manage and track law enforcement equipment distribution for VPSOs.

Significant Budget Change:

Five new Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) positions, \$1,215.2 UGF

Ms. Thornton summarized Slide 16 titled: "Fire, Life and Safety FY2026 UGF \$5,175.0:"

Contribution to the Overall Department Mission: Prevent the loss of life and property from fire and explosions.

Staff: 30 permanent full-time positions.

Core Services:

- Fire training programs and public education
- Fire and life safety inspections
- Building plan review for code compliance

FY2024 Accomplishments: Enforced fire prevention codes, conducted inspections, investigated fires, and provided public education to enhance statewide fire safety.

Challenges: Increased demand for fire prevention services.

Goals in FY2026: Expand fire prevention training and outreach, increase fire inspections, strengthen partnerships with local fire departments and first responders to improve statewide fire safety.

FY2026 adjustments that continue current service levels include a \$83.8 increase in UGF

Ms. Thornton highlighted Slide 17 titled "Alaska Police Standards Council FY2026 UGF \$1,570.1:"

Contribution to the Overall Department Mission: To produce and maintain highly trained and positively motivated professional officers, capable of meeting contemporary law enforcement standards of performance.

Staff: 5 permanent full-time positions.

Core Services:

- Provide academy, in-service, and advanced training for police, corrections, probation, parole, and municipal correctional officers.
- Ensure compliance with Alaska Police Standards Council (APSC) minimum qualification regulations.

FY2024 Accomplishments: APSC sponsored 712 officers across 48 advanced and in-service training events, totaling 23,298 hours of training. This included utilizing Mental Health Trust Authority Authorized Receipts grant funds to sponsor 2,103 officers in six training events, delivering 10,334 officer hours of training.

- No significant FY2026 adjustments to continue current service levels
- \$80.0 Continuation of Mental Health Trust Authority Receipts (MHTARR) to expand Crisis Intervention Training for law enforcement

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Ms. Thornton addressed Slide 18 titled "Statewide Support FY2026 UGF \$38,135.5:"

Contribution to the Overall Department Mission: Provides essential executive management and

administrative services, ensuring the department's effective operation.

Staff:230 permanent full-time positions, two 2 non-permanent positions.

Core Services:

- Administrative Services: Centralized support for budgeting, finance, procurement, personnel, grants, and facilities maintenance.

- Statewide Services: Maintains law enforcement data systems and criminal history records for justice and public safety agencies.

- Public Safety Training Academy: Provides basic and specialized police training, including VPSO training, in partnership with University of Southeast.

- Commissioner's Office: Manages legislative relations, policy development, labor relations, and public information coordination.

FY2026 adjustments that continue current service levels include a \$1,528.7 increase in UGF

Co-Chair Josephson asked about VPSO positions and cited slide 4 and referenced the bullet point: "Ten regional grantees partnered with 156 communities." He wondered how many villages were served by VPSO's. He had heard discrepancies with the number. Ms. Thornton answered that there were 156 villages that had Memorandums of Agreement with the 10 regional grantees administering the program. She elaborated that roughly 68 of the communities currently had at least one VPSO. One community may have five or six villages they provided VPSO services and housed multiple officers that roved to the other communities. She stressed that roving programs could be very expensive.

Representative Johnson asked a question regarding vessel replacement. Commissioner Cockrell answered that DPS was currently in the procurement process for the vessel and would possess the ship in one to two years.

Representative Bynum asked three questions related to recruitment and retention. He asked what they were doing on

youth recruitment. Mr. Morgan responded that they had an active explorer program in the Matsu and a fledgling one in Fairbanks. The department engaged in explorer programs and outreach to high schools. It was difficult to compile data on the programs' success. Representative Bynum asked that whether DPS wanted to see the programs revived and if it needed more engagement with local police departments. He asked if DPS would be willing to revive the programs. Mr. Morgan reiterated ASTs were engaged in the programs. In terms of offering long term stability for the programs, community focus was important. The department was very supportive of the program.

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Representative Bynum asked how many of DPS's recruits were former law enforcement, a youth first job, from other law enforcement within the state, and recruits out of state.

Co-Chair Josephson asked for written answers through his office.

Representative Bynum mentioned that retention was a very important issue for full funding. He had discovered that one of the major things talked about in his district was about how difficult the job was. He asked about the challenges and what the department was doing to make it easier for the trooper. Mr. Morgan replied that increasing staff was one of the most important things that lowered the number of service calls per trooper. He highlighted the department's wellness program that attributed significantly to retention. He would expand offline.

Co-Chair Josephson thanked the department.

Commissioner Cockrell relayed that the department struggled every day with where to place its troopers. He acknowledged that there were many places in the state without law enforcement. His goal was to increase public safety throughout the state.

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^OVERVIEW: FY 26 BUDGET BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

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Co-Chair Josephson invited the Department of Corrections (DOC) to the table.

APRIL WILKERSON, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, provided a PowerPoint titled "Department of Corrections: FY2026 Budget Overview," dated February 17, 2025 (copy on file). She introduced herself and colleagues. She began with Slide 2 titled "Organizational Chart:"

Commissioner's Office  
Division of Institutions  
Division of Health and Rehabilitation Services  
Division of Pretrial, Probation, and Parole  
Division of Administrative Services  
Parole Board

Ms. Wilkerson pointed out that the Board of Parole was budgetarily housed in the Department of Corrections (DOC) but administered to by the Governor's Office. She shared that within the executive team there was more than 130 years of combined DOC service.

Ms. Wilkerson moved to Slide 3 titled "Mission And Core Services:"

Mission: To provide secure confinement, reformative programs, and a process of supervised community reintegration to enhance the safety of our communities

Department FY2026 Positions: 2,124 PFT

Department FY2026 Budget Request: \$481,123.2

Ms. Wilkerson elaborated that the Core Services were Secure Confinement, Reformative Programs, and Supervised Release. The department was established as its own department in 1984 and formerly housed in Department of Health and Social Services.

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JAKE WYCKOFF, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS (via teleconference), reviewed Slide 4 titled "DOC AT A GLANCE:"

Alaska is one of seven states that operate a unified correctional system. A state unified system is one in which there is an integrated state-level prison and jail system.

DOC booked 26,998 offenders into its facilities in FY2024.

16,868 were unique offenders  
567 were non-criminal Title 47 bookings

As of January 1, 2025, DOC was responsible for 9,767 individuals

4,266 offenders in jail or prison  
250 offenders on sentenced electronic monitoring (EM)  
364 offenders in community residential centers (CRCs)  
3,382 offenders on probation or parole  
1,505 defendants on pretrial supervision (1,029 on pretrial EM).

Mr. Wyckoff indicated that jail systems in Alaska housed unsentenced individuals and prisons contained sentenced individuals. He discussed the difference between other states and Alaska that operated both prison and jail systems under one umbrella instead of separately. The department booked just under 27,000 offenders into DOC facilities in FY 24. He noted that the same number were released during that time. He disclosed that non-criminal bookings were alcohol and mental health holds.

Representative Galvin asked if the numbers were an increase in bookings since previous years. Mr. Wyckoff replied in the negative. He added that DOC facilities were at 81 percent of their maximum capacity.

Representative Galvin asked how many individuals were booked in prior years. Ms. Wilkerson reiterated that the number had decreased. The current number was below the prior number of roughly 32 thousand.

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Representative Stapp asked if the prisons were at 81 percent at capacity. Ms. Wilkerson answered they were at 81 percent of their maximum capacity that included general beds whether operational or not plus half the segregation beds that made the actual capacity much higher. Representative Stapp asked what much higher meant. Ms. Wilkerson responded that DOC was operating at closer to 91 percent. She provided an example of how the number was calculated.

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Ms. Wilkerson advanced to Slide 5 titled "FY 24 Major Accomplishments:"

Partnered with the Department of Family and Community Services and Alaska Psychiatric Institute to establish and open the jail-based restoration program at the Anchorage Correctional Complex.

Initiated the expansion of community placement options by using alternatives to the traditional community residential center placements. The department is running a pilot project on these placements, utilizing True North Recovery and Alaska Addiction and Rehabilitation Services (AARS).

Utilized the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) and the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC) resource guide to complete a thorough proactive needs assessment of all 13 correctional facilities statewide. The finalized report and recommendation are part of Project 2025, an effort to reduce in-custody annual suicides rates 20 percent by Calendar Year (CY) 2025.

Partnered with the Carpenter's Union and implemented a pre-apprentice carpentry program at Hiland Mountain and Wildwood Correctional Centers.

Implemented a pilot tablet program at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center. These tablets are used in a limited/restricted capacity for: Digital Law Library, Attorney Visitation, Court hearings, and the inmate handbook. In addition, the department and the Alaska Court System partnered to have Court tablets

operational for inmates at Goose Creek Correctional Center.

Under the department's statewide Wellness Program for employees and inmates, formalized a Critical Incident Stress Management/Peer Support team. The department trained 35 staff to be peer supporters and will be training additional supporters in early 2025. The Wellness Unit trained 54 Stronger Families trainers and implemented seven modules department wide. Approximately 1,000 department staff were trained in this program.

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Co-Chair Josephson assumed the peer support training related to Senator Dunbar's bill [SB 103-Peer Support Counseling Program, Chapter 54 SLA 24, 09/05/2024] that authorized someone that experienced trauma to confidentially seek counseling. Ms. Wilkerson answered affirmatively and noted that it expounded on the bill.

Representative Galvin appreciated time spent with the department over the interim and visits to facilities. She asked about the 7 placements at the Clitheroe Center (Anchorage) and the AARS community placement options. She wondered if it was cost effective. Ms. Wilkerson answered the costs were covered by private insurance, Medicaid, or other alternatives and did not add costs to the department. She asked about the work with suicide prevention and the federal effort on rape. Ms. Wilkerson deduced that she was talking about the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) and offered to provide the answer. Representative Galvin asked how many inmates participated in the pre-apprentice carpentry program. Ms. Wilkerson deferred the question.

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TRAVIS WELCH, DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF HEALTH AND REHAB SERVICES, DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS (via teleconference), did not have the precise numbers on hand. He would follow up.

Ms. Wilkerson relayed that Hiland Mountain Correctional Center had five women participating and Wildwood had 10. She reminded the committee it was a pilot program and DOC was hoping to expand the program. Representative Galvin

knew how important the programs were and asked how the legislature may help the department increase the capacity. She asked about the tablets cost and who paid for it.

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Ms. Wilkerson replied that currently the cost of the tablets was about \$50 per month per account. She added that considering the restricted capacity the cost was high. She pointed to a request in the FY 26 budget to fund the tablets and implement them fully. She noted there was also the [HB 35-Prisoners: Electronic Devices, Id Cards, Chapter 25 SLA25, 08/07/25] that would increase programming and other uses. She shared that DOC was looking into expanded use for things like telehealth and court hearings reducing departmental costs. Representative Galvin asked whether the expanded tablet opportunities were potential cost savings. Ms. Wilkerson answered in the affirmative.

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Ms. Wilkerson looked at Slide 6 titled "KEY CHALLENGES:"

Recruit, hire, and retain qualified staff to meet the challenge of public protection within fiscally responsible parameters

Management and movement of the offender population; providing assurance of proper offender classification for placement in Correctional Institutions, Community Residential Centers, and Electronic Monitoring

Control the cost and prevalence of chronic illnesses and communicable diseases among incarcerated offenders

Reduce the ongoing deterioration of the facilities

Ms. Wilkerson communicated that recruitment efforts were trending in the right direction and that vacancy across the department was at 10 percent. Correctional Officer vacancies lowered from 17 to percent to 4 percent statewide. The Spring Creek facility was currently at 18 percent vacancy, down from 38 percent in the prior two years. She reminded the committee that the department's population was driven by laws, law enforcement, etc. and was tricky to predict. In addition, DOC remained the

largest mental health provider in the state; inmates and facilities were aging which were high cost drivers.

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KEVIN WORLEY, ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS, highlighted Slide 7 titled "FY 2026 Operating Budget Request." He pointed to the bar chart and related that the FY 26 management plan showed a \$24.7 million or 5.4 percent from the prior fiscal year. He pointed to the four major fund categories: federal, other, DGF, and UGF. The federal funding was associated with man-day billings and other funds including the Restorative Justice And Recidivism Reduction funds. He emphasized that DOC was primarily funded via GF.

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Mr. Worley briefly discussed the remaining slides. He addressed Slide 8 titled "FY 2026 Operating Budget Request." The chart depicted a pie graph showing the largest item was UGF. He moved to Slide 9 titled "FY 2026 Operating Budget Request by Line Item." He indicated that the DOC's total expenditures amounted to \$481.123 million and noted that the largest share was for personal services as noted on the pie chart. He highlighted Slide 10 titled "Operating Budget Request By Division." He pointed out that the pie chart showed institutional costs comprised the largest portion, followed by Health and Rehabilitation and Pretrial, Probation, and Parole was third. He delineated that DOC recently created a new appropriation; Maintenance and Operations (M&O), in response to intent language included in the budget. The expenditures were reported within the other divisions; it was a double accounting and was funded by inter-agency receipts. Co-Chair Josephson asked if it was a new division. Mr. Worley clarified it was not a division, but merely a record keeping appropriation. The parole board represented the smallest portion of the pie chart.

Representative Hannan asked if the zero budget for the new M&O appropriation meant that no one was performing maintenance and operations in the department. She wondered if the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT) carried it out via inter-agency receipts.

Ms. Wilkerson answered that the maintenance positions were budgeted through the prison institutions themselves and the costs were reported. Institutions was the only division with M&O.

Co-Chair Josephson ascertained that it cost approximately \$13 million but it was under Institutions. Ms. Wilkerson answered affirmatively. She elaborated that previously the Institutions expenditure detail would include M&O, lease, utility, etc. costs, However, the new appropriation would record all of the institutional costs.

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Mr. Worley reviewed Slide 11 titled "Division Services." The slide depicted the Divisions, M&O, and Board of Parole budget and what services, programs, or activities each provided. He drew attention to the new M&O item that listed the items being accounted for. He summarized Slide 12 titled "FY 2026 Major Operating Budget Changes:"

Fund Source Changes:

Replace Funding Source Due to the Declining Federal  
Manday Revenue: -\$7,500 Fed \$7,500 UGF

Replace Funding Source to Align with Balance in  
Restorative Justice Fund (PFD Criminal Funds) in  
Physical Health Care: -\$2,428.9 Other \$2,428.9 UGF

Mr. Worley explained that the Manday revenue for federal holds in Alaska prisons was being reduced to federal holds only. The prior reimbursement included state holds if it was a combination of state and federal holds. The federal decrease was being replaced with UGF.

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Mr. Worley underlined Slide 13 titled " FY 2026 Major Operating Budget Changes:"

Fund Source Consolidation:

Consolidate Recidivism Reduction Funds into  
Community Residential Center (CRC) Component:-  
\$7,636.1 DGF \$7,636.1 UGF (Zero Net Effect)

Co-Chair Josephson assumed the funds were still going to programs for recidivism. He asked for clarification on the

recidivism reduction programs and if they were still reduction funds when moved to CRC's.

Ms. Wilkerson responded in the affirmative. She explicated that there were some recidivism reduction funds within the community residential center appropriation. Currently, The recidivism funds were consolidated in an effort to focus on community reintegration. She felt the action supported community reintegration and did not focus on the educational programing that was happening in the institution; that funding was backfilled with GF.

Co-Chair Josephson wondered about her statements regarding less of the educational component. Ms. Wilkerson answered that the funds were previously expended on educational training occurring within the institution. The department wanted to direct the recidivism reduction funds into one entity. Co-Chair Josephson stated that he needed to learn more about recidivism reduction and whether the funds were being used for constructive programs for ending the cycle of imprisonment. He asked for clarification.

[3:24:00 PM](#)

Ms. Wilkerson replied that the efforts were to help successfully reintegrate the inmate being furloughed out into the community.

Mr. Worley highlighted Slide 14 titled "FY 2026 Major Operating Budget Changes:"

Annual Facility and Maintenance Increase  
\$14,809.4 (Inter-Agency Receipts)

Establish Peer Support and Wellness Program  
\$500.0 (UGF)

Support Deployment of Inmate Tablets Costs Increases  
\$249.0 (UGF)

Lease Agreements Cost Increases  
\$154.0 (UGF)

Regional Community Jails Rising Costs  
\$195.0 (UGF)

Support Vocational Services and Training Expansion

Programs Costs \$850.0 (UGF)

Mr. Worley delineated that the second item, currently provided staff with peer support and confidential counseling within the institution. Currently, there were 3 staff within the Office of the Commissioner and the endeavor was supported through an unbudgeted Reimbursable Services Agreement (RSA) and were utilizing funds from other areas to support the priority initiative. The Regional Community Jail item was related to the Dillingham Community Jail contract that was removed from the prior year's budget and subsequently added back but not in the full amount of the contract. The request would fully fund the contract.

Representative Johnson pointed to the increment pertaining to deployment of inmate tablets. She asked if the tablets could be used to scan inmate paper communications to help stop contraband entering the facility. Ms. Wilkerson replied affirmatively; however, the department was limited on how they could be used. The department was currently copying and delivering mail for inmates due to prior budget funding. In the future, the mail could be scanned into the tablets.

Mr. Worley stated the final operating budget change was included in Slide 15 titled "FY 2026 Major Operating Budget Changes:"

Increase Authority for Supervisory Standby Pay for Supervisors Department Wide: \$3,904.7 General Funds (UGF)

[3:29:04 PM](#)

Representative Stapp discussed overtime and standby pay. He relayed that he regularly received communications from correctional employees. He reported that he received an email recently about standby pay. He asked how many upper management standby logs existed and how often they were called to work versus receiving the pay. Ms. Wilkerson answered that there were two standby rosters within the Division of Pretrial Probation and Parole. She elaborated that it was more efficient to have one for Probation and Parole and the other for Pretrial.

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Representative Stapp asked when the change to two rosters had been made. Ms. Wilkerson replied that it had been about two years. Representative Stapp asked if it was before or after a new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) was signed increasing standby pay. Ms. Wilkerson replied that she would follow up. She acknowledged that standby pay had been high in the past. Representative Stapp noted the topic was discussed in the prior year. He agreed that it was a high number. He asked for a list of the logs from the prior two years. Ms. Wilkerson answered that each allocation on the list had its own roster. She asked for clarification that he wanted the whole roster.

Co-Chair Josephson would like to know why he requested the roster.

Representative Stapp was curious how many times employees were on the roster versus how often they were called to work. He thought the pay was double. He wondered how often they were paid and did not work standby. Ms. Wilkerson would follow up with the information.

Co-Chair Josephson asked if the same rate was paid in both circumstances.

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Ms. Wilkerson answered that supervisors were paid for 2 hours (3 hours on weekends) on standby at their regular rate of pay no matter how many hours they worked outside their normal working hours.

Representative Johnson wondered if DOC had a plan to reduce overtime. Ms. Wilkerson responded that the department was "surprised" to discover the high standby costs and took measures to reduce it as she previously noted. In addition, she explained that there were multiple people on standby everyday by institution location. The department reevaluated that and limited it to one person per location. She pointed out that the Division of Pretrial Probation and Parole was split into regions. The commissioner was challenging all the directors to gain efficiencies in standby costs. She discussed overtime and reported that it slightly decreased but was still not reduced to the level the department wanted. She hoped that through recruitment efforts it would be further reduced. Representative Johnson asked about reasons for the increase in DOC's budget. Ms.

Wilkerson replied that the department experienced changes over the years; the budget was pretty dramatically reduced in FY 16 due to SB 91 [SB 91- Omnibus Crim Law & Procedure; Corrections, Chapter 36 SLA 16, 07/11/2016]. Subsequent legislation created budget growth. In addition, in 2019, the repeal of HB 49 [HB 49-Crimes;Sentencing;Drugs;Theft; Reports, chapter 4 FSSLA 19, 07/08/2019] passed, which resulted in an increase of nearly \$70 million in DOCs budget. She offered further detail.

[3:37:38 PM](#)

Representative Johnson asked what the vacancy rate was. Ms. Wilkerson replied it was 10 percent. Representative Johnson requested detailed information.

[Slide 16 titled "Goals and Objectives" was not discussed.]

Co-Chair Josephson had the same concerns. He thanked the department.

HB 53 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

HB 55 was HEARD and HELD in committee for further consideration.

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

#  
ADJOURNMENT

[3:39:02 PM](#)

The meeting was adjourned at 3:39 p.m.