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Release: Local Leaders Respond to Reduced State Spending
February 13, 2019

Governor Dunleavy promised and has proposed a budget that matches expenditures to revenues, while fully funding a short list of core services. He has been firm in his belief that Alaska does not have a revenue problem, and thus addressing one side of the equation is off the table. The result, unsurprisingly, and really the only option left to him, is now to shift additional responsibilities and costs to local governments and citizens, and reduce State services.

The Alaska Municipal League (AML) is concerned that this effort will result in a State unable to fulfill its responsibilities, wherein staff struggle to meet deadlines, federal compliance, statutory obligations, and mission. We recognize that right-sizing state government is an important goal but worry that “right” now means fewer services instead of efficient and effective delivery of those programs that Alaskans depend on.

As political subdivisions of the State, we fundamentally understand the responsibilities of good governance. We understand the fiscal situation of the State, which mirrors our own annual budgeting process. Local elected officials are responsive to community needs in a way that doesn’t always translate to State decision-making. But good governance demands that decisions made at one level take into account the impacts felt at others, and especially within communities and the economy.

State agencies need to have the resources available to conduct their work on behalf of Alaskans. Budgetary concerns are the single most destabilizing and demotivating factors in recruitment and retention in public service. AML recognizes the challenge this presents currently for police and firefighters, and for teachers – compounding it within State government can lead to regulatory deficiencies, permitting delays and the loss of essential data and experience.

Similarly, Alaskans depend on the ability of state agencies to understand the impacts of decision-making, and any lessened capacity in this regard would be to the detriment of good governance.

The Alaska Municipal League will over the coming weeks conduct an analysis of this budget’s impact on residents, students and communities. The governor has requested that Alaskans be vocal in their feedback, and we encourage local government leaders to contact the governor’s office to do just that.

Throughout the legislative session we will articulate the impact of this administration’s proposals on communities and residents. For now, and with the release of this budget, we will work with legislators who are concerned about a State unable to carry out its responsibilities, consistent with the laws that have been established in the public interest, and mitigate the negative impacts of this proposal.

Locally elected officials are committed to improving the social and economic well-being of Alaskans. AML is concerned that this budget has the opposite effect.