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Member of the National League of Cities and the National Association of Counties

The Honorable Donny Olson  
Senate Finance Subcommittee: Public Safety  
Alaska State Legislature

February 10, 2021

Senator Olson,

Public safety is a priority for the Alaska Municipal League, even as it is a Constitutional obligation of the State. It appears that the Governor's budget has funded the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program at a sufficient level, although slightly reduced by \$338,000. We would appreciate any additional detail to see if this is adequate, consistent with partner needs, or otherwise needs to be adjusted when considering the long-standing challenges that this vital program has experienced.

I want to call your attention to proposed regulations issued by the Alaska Police Standards Council (APSC) that call for additional training, certification, and reporting for all law enforcement, including Village Police Officers (VPOs) and VPSOs. That information can be found here: <https://aws.state.ak.us/OnlinePublicNotices/Notices/Attachment.aspx?id=125972>. What we don't see in the Governor's proposed budget are any resources to support the additional and necessary requirements. While we support the State's interest in improving public safety, we are worried that this effort is not sufficiently resourced. For those communities already struggling to afford what they have, we don't want to see them penalized for not having the resources to meet new requirements.

Senator, this is for your potential consideration - we would suggest that the State consider something like a Public Safety Matching Grant Program that would augment local government public safety. An amount equal to that of the VPSO program may be sufficient to provide all 70 communities with police powers a basic State grant of \$100,000, which could be applied to additional training, police professional liability insurance, uniforms, housing, and/or ballistic vests. The additional funds could be used on a pro rata basis to supplement officer retention through.

It wasn't too far back that the State began charging local governments to send officers to the Trooper training courses managed by the Department of Public Safety. We can't continue to see costs mount for local law enforcement, and in fact should be working to reduce them.

Respectfully,

Nils Andreassen  
Executive Director