

RESOLUTION #2020-03

Expressing support for rural law enforcement efforts such as the VPO and VPSO program, while recognizing the need for increased investment and the potential for reform to ensure both public safety and the sustainability of law enforcement efforts in rural Alaska.

WHEREAS, local governments play an important role in delivering public safety in Alaska, with 70 local governments in Alaska having police powers; and

WHEREAS, the combined budgets of 40 municipal police departments amount to \$75 million more than the entire budget of the State's Department of Public Safety; and

WHEREAS, public safety is a shared responsibility between the State and local governments; and

WHEREAS, public safety has been a priority of this administration, even as the nation's Attorney General has declared a public safety crisis in rural Alaska; and

WHEREAS, there exist important programs in the form of the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) and Village Police Officer (VPO), which perform essential public safety functions in communities without municipal law enforcement or a permanent State Trooper presence; and

WHEREAS, these programs face the same challenges as all law enforcement in Alaska, especially in terms of recruitment and retention of qualified officers; and

WHEREAS, vetting of VPOs is constrained by the capacity of local governments, even as recruitment of candidates is constrained by local options and by lack of visibility of potential candidates from across the state, among other reasons; and

WHEREAS, training opportunities for VPOs are limited and may be unaffordable for many local governments; and VPSO training costs have increased at the State Trooper academy; and

WHEREAS, the VPSO program has struggled to maintain full staffing, even as funding is reduced to reflect reduced numbers of VPSOs, and numerous challenges have been identified by program grantees and the Legislature; and

WHEREAS, multiple and intersecting challenges affect the efficacy of both the VPO and VPSO programs.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska Municipal League supports rural law enforcement efforts such as the VPO and VPSO programs; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Alaska Municipal League recognizes the need to match spending to needs identified by both programs, and for any necessary reform to ensure both public safety and the sustainability of law enforcement efforts in rural Alaska.