



## Village Public Safety Officer Program Celebrates Success

**February 19, 2021 (Anchorage, AK)** — Over the past year, the Department of Public Safety has drastically changed the administration the Village Public Safety Officer Grant program. This shift has already developed into a better dialogue on financial accountability, fostered new relationships within DPS with VPSO grantees, and has standardized grant management practices within DPS.

Until recently, the VPSO grants had been managed under the Division of Alaska State Troopers, and a suggestion was considered last spring to move to the program to Department of Commerce and Economic Development. However, instead, the grant and financial administration shifted internally to the DPS Division of Administrative Services. The goal was to put more control into the hands of the Grantees and provide greater accountability at the program level.

The DPS has shifted to a facilitative role in financial oversight, and less direct program involvement which has allowed the various Grantee Program Coordinators to spend their allotted funding more effectively. For example, one grantee had a need to purchase various small law enforcement supplies like Oleoresin capsicum (pepper spray) for their VPSOs. Previously the program would need to receive specific permission to make this purchase as it was not specifically written into their grant to purchase. The need was very real, and the program coordinator was able to move ahead with the purchase without having to apply for supplemental approval from DPS. In the past, seeking permission for purchases not specifically requested in the approved grant budget would have delayed an obviously relevant purchase for public safety.

The change also encourages the individual programs to work together on statewide spending for the program to help reduce unspent program funds. Grantees can work together on combined spending plans for statewide needs. Currently all 10 grantees are working together on the procurement of needed new law enforcement tools, fire personnel protection equipment and new uniforms.

“Consistently we are hearing from the grantees that they are appreciating the changes and the current relationship,” stated **Interim Commissioner Kelly Howell, Department of Public Safety**. “We thank the program coordinators for their enthusiastic dedication to working with us to better their ability to best manage their grants. Our department will strive to keep the momentum and continue to find ways to make the VPSO program improve and flourish.”

The operational aspects of the program remain with the Division of Alaska State Troopers, but responsibilities are handled at a detachment level, instead of a centralized office, where oversight troopers have a better understanding of local needs and culture. These shifts are all about local control, and DPS is committed to continuing to work on solutions with our VPSO grantee partners.

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