

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY FISCAL YEAR 2026 BUDGET PRESENTATION

MISSION STATEMENT

The Department of Public Safety provides planning, prevention, and protection services through the work of its six Divisions, to ensure a safe and secure environment and enhanced quality of life for the people of the State of Vermont.

CREATION OF THE DEPARTMENT

The Department of Public Safety was created by No. 163 of the Acts of 1947 for the "purpose of consolidating certain existing police and investigative agencies, and to promote the detection and prevention of crime generally." No. 224 of the Acts of 1951 created the Division of Civil Defense (now Division of Emergency Management) within the Department of Public Safety. No. 141 of the Acts of 2004 created the Fire Safety Division in the Department of Public Safety consisting of the Fire Prevention Division from the Department of Labor and Industry and incorporation of the Fire Service Training Council within Public Safety.

The Department of Public Safety is organized into six divisions: Vermont State Police (VSP), Criminal Justice Services (CJS), Vermont Emergency Management (VEM), the Vermont Forensic Laboratory (VFL), Fire Safety (FS), and Administration.

VERMONT STATE POLICE DIVISION

The Vermont State Police are the primary law enforcement agency in the state, providing 24-hour coverage to 212 of the state's 257 towns and villages or 46% of the state population on a full-time basis. In geographic terms, this accounts for 84% of the total land area in Vermont.

The State Police is led by the Director (Colonel) and has three divisions identified as the Field Force Division, Criminal Investigation Division and the Support Services Division

Field Force Division:

The Field Force Division of the Vermont State Police consists of sworn members and civilian staff members. The division consists of over 200 uniformed troopers assigned to 10 field stations throughout the state. These troopers provide a wide array of services to Vermont's citizens and visitors ranging from responding to quality-of-life type calls to investigating domestic violence and fatal car crashes.

The Field Force Division's mission is to provide for the safety of the citizens of Vermont and its visitors through prevention and enforcement efforts. Troopers strive to perform their duties in an unbiased fashion reinforcing the public trust and inspiring public confidence. Our departmental resources provide services from conventional patrol and investigation to comprehensive responses to major incidents. Troopers utilize cooperative and data driven law enforcement strategies. Beyond conventional emergency calls, troopers protect families against sexual predators, target domestic violence, combat substance abuse, and work with all communities for emergency preparedness.

The Division is organized as follows:

- **Troop A:** Commanded by a captain this Troop covers the northern half of Vermont with field stations in Williston, St. Albans, Middlesex, Derby and St. Johnsbury.
- **Troop B:** Commanded by a captain this Troop covers the southern half of Vermont with field stations in Westminster, Royalton, New Haven, Rutland and Shaftsbury.
 - **Special Operations:** Commanded by a captain this command oversees all special teams and unit programs. The captain is supported by an executive officer holding the rank of lieutenant.
 - **Emergency Services:** The unit is comprised of two sergeants who focus on special team disciplines. They provide subject matter expertise to instruct and support agency response to complex incidents as well as aid planning for special events such as the Women's World Cup Ski Race, Green Mountain Stage Race and inaugural ceremony. Their services are provided to other state agencies and local entities.
 - **Safety Programs:** Three sergeants and a trooper are assigned to safety programs. Each are highly trained to serve as subject matter experts in their specific field:
 - **Traffic Safety program:** This unit coordinates traffic safety programs statewide, manages VSP traffic related grants and VSP's DRE program, conducts outreach and training and ensures strong public messaging on traffic safety.

- **Crash Reconstruction** – One sergeant and one trooper are assigned to perform crash reconstruction duties on a full-time basis. These members lend their expertise to advance investigation of the most serious traffic collisions that occur in Vermont.
- **Recreational Enforcement Unit** – Staffed by a sergeant, a civilian boating law administrator, as well as auxiliary troopers. This unit administers Vermont’s Recreational Boating Safety program, along with performing enforcement of recreational boat and snowmobile laws.
- **Special Teams:** The Vermont State Police have developed a variety of specialized teams and resources staffed by highly trained sworn and civilian members. These “Special Teams” include Canine Unit, Critical Incident Dispatch Team, Clandestine Laboratory Team, Search and Rescue Team, Tactical Services Unit, Crisis Negotiation Unit, Bomb Squad, Underwater Recovery Team, Honor Guard, Critical Action Team, Unmanned Aircraft Systems, Crime Scene Search Team, Members Assistance Program, and Crash Reconstruction Team. The Vermont State Police have two Mobile Command Posts that respond with total dispatch capabilities (Critical Incident Dispatch Team). We stand ready to assist all allied agencies in times of crisis both statewide and throughout New England. These teams regularly serve the needs of municipal and county agencies and in most cases, are the only asset of their type in Vermont.

Criminal Division:

The Criminal Division provides specific expertise in criminal investigations and is made up of the **Bureau of Criminal Investigation**, the **Major Crime Unit** and **Special Investigations**. Detectives with specialized training, technical skills and expertise work collaboratively on a wide variety of crimes to include the most serious and complex criminal investigations. The Criminal Division is committed to providing assistance and resources whenever needed in support of all other local, county, state and federal law enforcement agencies in Vermont.

The **Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI)** is primarily responsible for the investigation of all untimely deaths to include natural, accidental and suicides and provide investigative support for all homicide investigations. Additionally, detectives handle all in-custody death investigation, to include those in correctional centers. Other primary investigations conducted by BCI detectives include, sex crimes, severe child abuse and neglect, robberies, assaults, fraud, arson, computer crimes, sex offender registry violations and applicant background investigations. BCI detectives also conduct special investigations upon request by other local and county law enforcement agencies. Special Investigation Unit (SIU) detectives investigate crimes of a sexual nature and extreme cases of child abuse and neglect. Troopers assigned to this unit work in conjunction and cooperation with local police agencies as well as the Department of Children and Families, state prosecutors and victim advocacy organizations statewide in a multi-disciplinary team approach to the investigation and prosecution of these crimes.

The **Major Crime Unit (MCU)** is primarily responsible for investigating the most serious crimes, specifically all homicides and officer involved shootings. MCU will investigate missing person cases that are suspicious in nature and / or when foul play is suspected; and other complex investigations as needed to include unsolved homicides. The Polygraph Unit falls under MCU and conducts criminal polygraph examinations for all Vermont law enforcement agencies; and conducts examinations for Vermont State Police applicants. The Crime Scene Search Team (CSST) is a special team within MCU that is made up of troopers from across the state that have specialized training in crime scene processing. The CSST

responds to all homicides and officer involved shooting investigations and is available upon request for other crimes as needed to include assisting outside agencies. An MCU detective is assigned to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner as a law enforcement liaison. The Technology Investigation Unit (TIU) was created in 2017 as an expansion of the Computer Crime Unit specializing in the collection and analysis of digital evidence. As part of the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (ICAC), the TIU serves as specialized support to state, local, county and federal law enforcement across the state. The Executive Protection Unit (EPU) provides security for the Governor of Vermont and assists with security for visiting dignitaries; identifies and investigates threats against the Governor or other State Officials. EPU falls under the supervision of the TIU commander.

The **Special Investigations** section is made up of the Narcotics Investigation Unit, the Vermont Intelligence Center and the Fire Investigation Unit. The Fire Investigation Unit is responsible for determining cause and origin of fires and conducting investigations on those fires ruled as arson or suspicious in nature. Fire investigators work closely with members of the Department of Fire Safety and all fire departments throughout the state.

The Vermont Intelligence Center (VIC) mission is to collect, analyze, and disseminate information to identify, investigate, and prevent criminal activity and protect the citizens and critical infrastructures vital to our society. The VIC supports all local, county state and federal law enforcement. The VIC is also the central point for tracking all missing persons and coordinates information on these investigations. The VIC interacts with all law enforcement agencies in order to exchange intelligence throughout the state, the country, and internationally. It serves as Vermont's comprehensive criminal intelligence center to assist all law enforcement with criminal and counterterrorism investigations and operations. Through these collaborative efforts the VIC seeks to advance the efficient, timely and accurate exchange of information between all of its law enforcement and homeland security partners, at all levels of government, while safeguarding the rights and privacy of all citizens.

The Narcotics Investigation Unit (NIU) is responsible for the oversight and operation of the Vermont Drug Task Force (VDTF), a multi-jurisdictional task force made up of state troopers, local and county officers who are dedicated full time to enforcing state and federal drug laws. The primary focus of the Vermont Drug Task Force is to disrupt the flow of illegal drugs into Vermont by targeting mid to high level dealers who are trafficking for profit. Investigative efforts are primarily focused on Fentanyl and opiates but include other illicit drugs to include cocaine, crack cocaine and methamphetamine. Drug diversion detectives work closely with the VDTF to identify individuals involved in prescription drug fraud.

The Special Investigations section dedicates three members to the FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force, the FBI Cyber Task Force and the FBI Transnational Organized Crime Task Force. The Vermont State Police collaborates with the FBI on these three initiatives by providing task force members to investigate terrorist activity, cyber crime and transnational organized crime within and around the State of Vermont.

Support Services Division:

The mission of the Support Services Division is to provide all civilian and sworn personnel of the Vermont State Police with the resources required to effectively perform their assigned duties and to enhance the capabilities of the Vermont State Police. Each section within the Support Services Division is an integral part of the planning and management of a broad range of services and programs provided to the organization.

The Support Services Division is responsible for operating two Emergency Communications Centers, both of which serve as Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) and are staffed by professional civilian Emergency Communication Dispatchers (ECDs). Besides providing all primary radio communications for state police, their duties include taking approximately 70% of E911 calls for service, emergency and non-emergency calls for service ensuring that first responders are dispatched to critical incidents. Additionally, the two Emergency Communication Centers currently

dispatch for approximately 100 additional fire, EMS and law enforcement organizations, as well as for other state level law enforcement organizations.

Staff Operations:

The Office of Staff Operations is housed within the Support Services Division and is comprised of the Office of Professional Development & Training, liaison to the Agency of Digital Services (ADS), and the Vermont State Police Quartermaster.

The **Office of Professional Development/Training** supports the career and professional development of every sworn member, auxiliary trooper and emergency communications personnel and will work cooperatively with all stakeholders to:

- Establish outreach programs to recruit and hire individuals whose core values reflect those of the Vermont State Police.
- Promote individual development and advancement through continuing training and development programs designed to build and expand professional skills and knowledge.
- Endorse programs that foster the total health and well-being of our members.
- Retain capable individuals within the Vermont State Police.
- Engender a culture of mentorship and diversity throughout the department.
- Cultivate the next generation of public safety leaders.
- Engage members in the policy and procedure review and development process.

The role of the **Quartermaster** is to provide supplies and field services to members of the department and will:

- Manage efficient and cost-effective equipment inventory and distribution systems.
- Maintain positive relationships with department supply vendors.
- Prepare and submit equipment purchase orders.

The **Office of Technology Services** has been relocated to the division of Criminal Justice Services but continues to support the technology needs of the Vermont State Police. Our technology needs are assessed and facilitated through our liaison to ADS.

The Office of Professional Standards:

The Office of Professional Standards is housed in the Support Services Division and comprises the policy development and accreditation program for the Vermont State Police. Is also comprised of the **Office of Fair and Impartial Policing** and **Community Affairs and the Office of Internal Affairs**.

- Serves as accreditation manager for CALEA accreditation
- Serves on the use of force training committee
- Manages employee performance program (Guardian Tracking)
- Coordinates Vermont State Police interests in Public Records Act/Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

- Maintains the database “PowerDMS,” the department resource for policy and other critical documentation

The **Office of Fair and Impartial Policing and Community Affairs** is housed within the Support Services Division and has co-directors, one who is a sworn member and one who is a community member, who develop and implement programming to ensure fair and impartial policing at every level within the department.

The Directors work within all three divisions in the following focus areas:

- Recruitment and hiring
- Training
- Supervision and accountability
- Relationship-building with a diverse range of communities
- Traffic stop data collection
- Assessment of institutional practices
- Policy assessment and development

The **Office of Internal Affairs** was established by the Legislature in 1979. The purpose of the Office of Internal Affairs is to investigate, or cause to be investigated, all complaints regarding conduct by members of the Vermont State Police. The enacting legislation can be found at 20 V.S.A. §1923 <<http://www.leg.state.vt.us/statutes/fullsection.cfm?Title=20&Chapter=113&Section=01923>.

The Vermont State Police **Public Information Officer** is housed within the Support Services Division, though it serves the overall VSP objective of keeping the public informed of policing activities while protecting individual privacy, ongoing criminal investigations, and the rights of victims and the accused. To fulfill this function, the VSP utilizes a variety of methods to disseminate information to the public including press releases, social media, response to public information requests, incident reporting, and web-based content. The outreach and distribution of information is an important component of the VSP mission and our service to the people of Vermont. The Vermont State Police Public Information Officer (PIO) leads these efforts. The PIO responds to media inquiries and public relations requests as quickly, completely and accurately as possible. The PIO is also responsible for all facets of our social media platforms and contributes to our recruitment efforts.

Fleet Services is an integral part of the Support Services Division and serves the VSP while also serving the fleet related needs of the entire Department. Fleet Services responsibilities include:

- Vehicle purchase/issuance.
- Maintenance and repairs.
- Installation of emergency equipment.
- Fuel.
- Vehicle crashes.
- Surplus vehicles disposal.

Fleet Services performs many of the large repairs and all of the outfitting and striping of Vermont State Police and other DPS vehicles. Fleet works closely with local repair facilities for overflow maintenance, routine preventative maintenance and parts procurement. In addition, Fleet Services operates an intra-department wrecker service and is responsible for capturing vehicle usage data for trend analysis and the replacement cycle. Fleet personnel also work closely with trained department driving instructors to support the Emergency Vehicle Operation Course (EVOC) training cycle by ensuring vehicles are available and ready for training.

Vermont State Police Key Budget Issues:

- **Recruit, retain and develop both VSP troopers and VSP dispatch professionals:** The current national climate has had a significant impact on the number of applicants for police positions throughout the nation and that has also impacted agencies within Vermont to include the VSP. The VSP is in an unprecedented period in its history as the VSP is currently operating with 52 sworn vacancies (15.1%). The VSP needs to make every attempt to stay at the authorized strength of 322 (329 with 5 Anti-Heroin grant positions and 2 positions funded by the Town of Waterbury) If the VSP is unable to recruit and/or hire a sufficient number of new troopers during each six-month hiring cycle, it will be impossible to maintain adequate staffing level which, in turn, will increase overtime costs and place additional burdens on existing staff.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES DIVISION

The Division of Criminal Justice Services exists to *support* the Departmental mission by providing its criminal justice, emergency service, governmental, public, and private customers with *systems and services* through the Radio Technology Services and the Vermont Crime Information Center units.

Radio Technology Services is an enterprise program, which provides the following services:

As a true end-to-end service provider, Radio Technology Services provides 7/24/365 support for wireless mission critical programs and telephony systems.

Wireless two-way Land Mobile Radio Systems (LMR) - We engineer, procure, construct and maintain mission critical wireless voice solutions for various State of Vermont Agencies, Departments and First Responder organizations. These systems provide Push-to-Talk (PTT) voice connectivity

between a dispersed group of people to stay in touch with central dispatch and each other. This is accomplished through the use of radio towers, microwave and fiber optic networks specifically engineered to be fault tolerant and constructed by the department for this application. This PTT functionally is the primary reason LMR systems exist, and this functionally is not available commercially. Major users of LMR technology outside the Department of Public Safety include the Agency of Transportation, Department of Corrections and the Department of Fish & Wildlife.

Vermont Microwave Network – The network provides broadband connectivity for public safety wireless systems. This system, in many cases, is the only network available to connect the various land mobile radio systems to the dispatch centers. This microwave system is used for radio transmitter control functions, voice and data transmission, and emergency communication systems for DPS and other agencies, including all Vermont Communications (VCOMM) users. VCOMM is a statewide interoperable radio system developed to provide cross discipline communications between Police, Fire and EMS practitioners.

Telephony - The Department of Public Safety operates an independent Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VoIP) and digital telephone network. These telephone systems and Vermont's 911 system collectively allow the flow of emergency calls from the public to be transferred to the first responders dispatch center. It is essential that these systems remain operational to ensure the safety of the public and the first responder. The Radio Technology Services program is the single point of contact for departmental members experiencing issues with the department's telephone services. We receive, dispatch and coordinate all emergency calls, call outs and other requests for preventive and corrective actions. We diagnose and analyze problems/malfunctions and find solutions for execution of nonstandard requests and scenarios.

FirstNet - The Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 created the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet). The law gives FirstNet the mission to build, operate and maintain the first high-speed, nationwide wireless broadband network dedicated to public safety. FirstNet will provide a single interoperable platform for emergency and daily public safety communications. The office of RTS is the designated Single Point of Contact (SPOC), we represent all of Vermont first responders by promoting their communication needs to the national authority.

The Vermont Crime Information Center (VCIC) serves as the state repository for a wide variety of criminal history record information and processes. Complete criminal histories are kept for individuals that interact with the criminal justice system including arrest, arraignment, and disposition. The center is responsible for disseminating centralized criminal history information for authorized criminal justice and non-criminal justice purposes to a variety of agencies. During FY 2024 VCIC processed 26,218 fingerprint supported record checks for employment and volunteer positions, an increase of 35% compared to FY 2019 (the last full year pre-COVID). Similarly, during FY 2024 VCIC processed 9,618 expungement and sealing orders issued by the judiciary, an increase of 125% compared to FY 2019 (the last full year pre-COVID). Continued high volume in both noted areas will continue to create significant operational challenges for VCIC moving forward.

Program management is also provided by the VCIC for the statewide Sex Offender Registry (SOR), tracking over 1,400 active offenders across Vermont.

Additional criminal justice information programs supported by the VCIC include:

- The National Crime Information Center (NCIC) which allows Vermont access to national wanted, missing person, stolen items, and other related files,
- The National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS), providing state and national criminal incident statistics,
- The National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) which processes firearm purchase and transfer applications,
- The National Data Exchange (N-DEx), a national clearinghouse of criminal history information used for investigatory purposes.

Criminal Justice Services Division Key Budget Issues:

- **Record Check Processing:** Fingerprint-supported criminal history requirements continue to expand across both the governmental and private sector, including multiple professional interstate compacts in 2023. Similarly, processing complexities continue to be introduced at federal and state levels adding further workload. This increasing program complexity intersects with continued high levels of processing volume and the initiation of a required statewide audit program for recipients of criminal history record information. Any new requirements of complexities within this workflow will lead to longer processing times for fingerprint supported record checks.
- **National Crime Information Center (NCIC):** As part of a national modernization effort, NCIC datasets will be transitioning to the NIEM XML architecture in the coming years (currently estimated to be 2024). While this will allow a significant improvement in data exchange and standardization capabilities it will require updates to state information architecture to handle additional complexity and customization allowed by this upgrade. Discussions with Agency of Digital Services and vendor staff continue preparation for this long-term improvement, while implementation costs may be substantial, based upon initial technical analysis.
- **Information Architecture:** While the current information architecture supporting criminal history data exchange at the local, state, and national level continues to provide a high level of stability, the underlying technical architecture is rapidly approaching end-of-life status, generating reliability and security concerns. Similarly existing systems do not support modern flexibility, management, and customization requirements. The necessity to upgrade to the newest federal security standards along with an impending move to a cloud-based environment will require a re-examination of funding priorities and may require longer-term financial support and statewide information technology policy updates. This will also necessitate a move away from the purchase and maintain model of technology management where a large initial outlay of funds is supported by several years of lower maintenance costs while delivered systems quickly become technically obsolete.
- **Radio Technology Update Funding:** RTS supports numerous land mobile radio networks and supporting technology for use by State Agencies, Departments and Municipalities. RTS provides and supports the state's private microwave network which supports the state's mission critical communications technologies. Additionally, RTS supports the telephone system used by the department for the purpose of receiving NG911 transfer calls and general business needs. Some of the hardware used in these systems has exceeded its useful life expectancy and should be replaced. Other system elements should be upgraded to leverage the newest features and to ensure compatibility

with current technology. Collectively, these mission critical systems are relied on by our first responders and the public and directly supports the mission of the Department.

- **Technician and Program Staffing:** RTS relies on a technically skilled staff of communications technicians to operate and maintain statewide land mobile radio systems, the high-capacity and redundant digital microwave carrier system, secure intra-state and inter-state data communications system and DPS internal telephone systems. In recent years our statewide distribution of technicians has been reduced, while our deployment of new, more complex technologies has increased. Telephone support is provided by a single person which creates hardships for our customer base and backlogs of work when the individual is absent. Additionally, there is very limited administrative support for RTS so that all clerical type duties must be performed by program staff.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIVISION

The mission of Vermont Emergency Management is to ensure the people and communities of Vermont have the capabilities to prevent, protect, mitigate, respond to, and recover from natural and man-made threats and hazards in order to enhance the safety, quality of life, and economic vitality of the State and its citizens. With authority derived from Title 20, VSA, VEM leads the coordination of federal, state, local, private sector and military resources in disaster response and recovery. The State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) serves as the Governor's central coordination point for the State response to emergencies, disasters, and large-scale events. The SEOC is staffed and managed by VEM personnel with assistance from other state agencies and external partners. VEM manages programs that include state, local government, and private sector emergency planning, outreach, training and exercises.

VEM's success lies in forging partnerships with a wide range of federal, state, regional, local, military and private sector entities that augment the core mission of the division. VEM maintains a Watch Officer Program that coordinates response to daily incidents occurring in the state 24/7/365. The VEM Watch Officer is the single point of contact to access resources critical to disasters statewide. VEM administers sub-grants to Regional Planning Commissions, State Agencies and municipalities for preparedness, planning, protection, prevention, response, recovery, and mitigation activities.

VEM is organized in five sections- Operations and Logistics, Engagement, Planning, Recovery and Mitigation. Full descriptions of section responsibilities are provided below. The Division programmatically manages several federal and state funding streams, including all disaster funds allocated as a result of federally declared Stafford Act disasters.

Recovery

The Recovery Section supports the State Recovery Officer in activating and coordinating long-term Recovery Support Functions (agriculture, economic recovery, housing, cultural and historic recovery, individual and family needs assistance, and infrastructure). This includes serving as a Recipient of the Public Assistance Program, FEMA's largest funding stream, which delivers federal cost-share support for infrastructure recovery. Other duties include:

- Lead for maintaining and updating the Recovery Mission Area Plan and the Recovery Task Force Plans within the State Emergency Management Plan.
- Support the State Recovery Officer in carrying out recovery efforts as articulated in the Recovery Mission Area Plan.
- Pro-active technical assistance and training to local and regional personnel between disasters.

Mitigation

The Hazard Mitigation Section supports municipalities, Regional Planning Commissions, and state agencies in applying for and implementing projects under FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant programs and state funding. Section staff supports municipalities and Regional Planning Commissions in conducting natural hazard mitigation planning and developing FEMA-approved Local Hazard Mitigation Plans. Other duties include:

- Facilitating the coordination of the State Hazard Mitigation Committee.
- Updating the State Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- Development and implementation of policies, procedures and guidelines for the Flood Mitigation Assistance Program, Flood Resilient Communities Fund, Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities, and Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program; and
- Pro-active technical assistance and training to local and regional personnel between disasters.

Operations and Logistics

The Operations & Logistics Section administers and manages the networks needed to support local governments and other stakeholders during the response phase of an emergency. This section focuses on sustaining a centralized network for VEM and the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC) to deliver assistance, notifications, and capabilities to local governments and other stakeholders. The operations and logistics section supports VEM's communications and logistics missions. This function is paramount to ensuring VEM has an interoperable network with redundancy for emergency communications. The Operations and Logistics Section is responsible for the Watch Officer program, the State's 24-hour, 365-days-a-year position for emergency incidents, activities, and events within the State of Vermont. The Watch Officer receives notifications from stakeholders and distributes notifications to relevant stakeholders to initiate operational readiness, situational awareness, and emergency coordination actions needed to support emergency incidents, activities, and events within Vermont.

Planning

The Planning Section is comprised of personnel responsible for developing all-hazards planning, preparedness and training activities. This section is primarily responsible for the coordination, revision, and maintenance of several state level plans and procedures including the State Emergency Management Plan which has many annexes focusing on response, response support and recovery activities. These initiatives drive multiple federal funding priorities and provide an overall capability assessment of preparedness in the State. Planners work closely with assigned state agencies and departments to ensure the enterprise is prepared to respond and recover effectively and consistent with the State Emergency Management Plan. The Planning Section is also responsible for agency/department level exercises and for the State catastrophic exercise.

Engagement Section

This Section is responsible for the management of the statewide Training program and works directly with state and local jurisdictions to provide training both directly and through the acquisition of nationally acclaimed instructors. By developing the annual Integrated Preparedness Plan, VEM delivers relevant and needed training to emergency responders and managers as well as municipal and state officials with key roles in disaster response. The Section also ensures direct support to local jurisdictions throughout the planning, training, and exercise cycle with field-based Regional Coordinators. Regional Coordinators work directly with local jurisdictions to guide them through the planning process as well as respond to hardest-hit areas during disasters to provide technical assistance.

Vermont Emergency Management Key Budget Issues:

With the increase of funding for mitigation projects as well as an increase in the interest from towns and individuals, the VEM mitigation section is in need of additional personnel to ensure that applicants receive timely support. Timely service to the applicants is essential as some have been recently devastated by a disaster and they are quickly looking to ensure they complete a mitigation project to ensure the next disaster is not as devastating. Given the complex nature of mitigation projects including their scoping, funding and execution, extensive outreach is necessary and with the ever-increasing number of disasters there are an ever-increasing number of mitigation projects that need to be supported.

FIRE SAFETY DIVISION

The Fire Safety Division ensures the safety of the public through code enforcement, public fire safety education, hazardous materials response, urban search and rescue, firefighter training, licensing and certification of professional trade people. The Division has 4 regional offices (Waterbury, Williston, Springfield and Rutland) and the Fire Academy located in Pittsford and the Haz Mat and USAR Team located in Colchester. Collectively we are responsible for protecting Vermonters and visitors from fire, electrocution hazards, carbon monoxide poisoning, hazardous material releases, building collapse, flooding, explosions, and barrier-free access for persons with disabilities for Vermont's 80,000 public buildings. The primary day-to-day operational activities include building construction inspections, purchase and sale inspections, complaint inspections, annual inspections of nursing homes and community care homes, plan review and permitting of new construction for compliance with the building code, electrical and plumbing inspections, heating system inspection, and inspection of bulk propane dispensing operations. Most recently and we recently became the primary authority having jurisdiction for the enforcement of the Rental Housing Health and Safety Code.

The Division works collaboratively with many groups including but not limited to; Historic Preservation, Economic Development, Public Service, ANR, Career Fire Chiefs, Vermont State Fire Fighters Association, Professional Firefighters, Vermont Fire Chiefs, Access Board, Elevator Safety Board, Electrical Licensing Board, Housing Counsel, Downtown Board, Plumbing Board, Apprenticeship Counsel and Department of Aging and Independent Living, BGS, Corrections, National Association of State Fire Marshals, National Fire Protection Association, International Code Council and many local government bodies. Recognizing the Division does not have adequate resources to inspect all public buildings, we have entered into cooperative inspection agreements with municipalities around the state. Inspection agreements allow cities and towns to enforce the same codes and standards on behalf of the State, increasing the total number of inspections conducted in Vermont.

Over 95% of the Division's funding comes from special funds we receive very little general fund money. Special fund revenue comes from plan review permit fees, with the construction plan review permit fee generating between \$3.5 and \$4.5 million a year. Remaining special funds are from electrical and plumbing work notices, licensing fees and third-party inspection fees. The Division's remaining funds are general funds and transfers from other departments.

The Vermont Fire Academy was established through the Vermont Fire Service Training Council, which was created on May 3, 1988, when Governor Madeleine Kunin signed Senate Bill S.83. The eleven member VFSTC was formed to establish curriculum and deliver fire fighter training to all Vermont fire fighters, a program that continues in its present configuration within the Division of Fire Safety of the Department of Public Safety. The Vermont Fire Academy Council continues to develop training and certification programs for all Vermont fire fighters under the guidance of the Training Council.

Vermont Fire Academy Operations: The Chief of Training oversees the operations of the Vermont Fire Academy located at the Emergency Services Training Facility in Pittsford, VT. The Vermont Fire Academy has a full-time staff of 7 and is responsible for administering, developing, delivering, and documenting all fire fighter training for both career and volunteer participants. Each year the academy delivers critical and valuable training directly to the approximately 4,500 fire fighters and 243 fire departments throughout Vermont. Training is delivered both on-campus and locally using an outreach delivery model. Training offerings include certification programs and in-service training courses. These include Firefighter I & II, Fire Instructor I, Fire Officer I & II, Fire Inspector I & II, Hazardous Materials for First Responders, Pumping Apparatus Driver-Operator, and Incident Command Management to name a few.

The Fire Academy is proudly accredited by the Pro Board, which provides internationally recognized certifications to our fire fighters. Last year, the Fire Academy served 569 students in our certification programs and 2,504 individual students in a multitude of in-service training courses. The Fire Academy continues to develop new training to target the new hazards facing our fire fighters. The East Cottage Dormitory has been a welcome addition to our facilities in Pittsford. The East Cottage now provides hundreds of overnight stays each year, providing improved access to training and allowing us to hold more multi-day courses for our emergency responders.

Hazardous Material Response Team: The State HAZMAT Team was created in 1994 to assist all fire departments in Vermont when managing hazardous materials incidents. The team's authorizing legislation as well as the creation of the HAZMAT Team Chief can be found in [Vermont Statutes, 20 V.S.A. § 33](#). The purpose for the Team's creation was and remains to work with local fire chiefs before, during and after hazardous materials events in their municipalities. HAZMAT Technicians are geographically located across the State with three HAZMAT response vehicles strategically located and equipped with useful state of art sophisticated equipment ready to support Incident Commanders on the ground in making critical life safety decisions that may have a profound impact on a community. In addition, the Team can call upon any of the twenty HAZMAT trailers loaded with emergency response equipment strategically positioned in local fire departments throughout the State. These trailers contain equipment, which may be used for operations level HAZMAT response as well as to perform "gross" and "technical" decontamination. The Vermont HAZMAT Response Team (VHMRT) endeavors to have highly trained and equipped personnel on scene quickly when requested by the Incident Commander. The Team trains monthly with local fire departments and other State Agencies including the Civil Support Team ensuring an effective and efficient use of resources. The Team has been a role model for other States.

Urban Search and Rescue: The State Urban Search and Rescue Team (USAR) was created in 2002 to assist all communities in Vermont when deployed by the Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS). The State Urban Search and Rescue Team is authorized under Vermont Statutes, 20 V.S.A. Sec 15 § 50. The Team is trained in All Hazard incidents ranging from technical rope rescue to building collapse and swiftwater rescue/flood response. The team's primary equipment cache is in Colchester however, other water rescue assets are geographically stationed within local public safety response agencies throughout the State.

The USAR team responds at the request of the local incident commander when advanced technical assistance is required or when local assets are exhausted. USAR is pre-deployed through the DEMHS when serious incidents develop, or severe flooding is predicted. The team is trained and equipped with specialized advanced technical rescue equipment and is capable of rescuing persons entombed in building collapses, floodwaters or areas otherwise inaccessible by local rescuers. The USAR Team can operate self-sufficient for up to 72 hours without support. The USAR Team has four (K9) partners certified to do live searches here in Vermont. All four dogs are certified by FEMA/SUSAR evaluators and can be used anywhere in the United States. The Haz Mat Team and USAR Team is collocated to Colchester in a State-owned building owned by VTRANS.

Fire Safety Key Budget Issues:

- **Financial (Fire Academy):** The general fund revenue we receive pays for the 7 full time staff positions at the fire academy in Pittsford and we administer/manage the delivery of fire service training to thousands of first responders at no cost to the student or sending fire department. The movement of these full-time positions to the general fund from the special fund occurred in FY24 to make additional special funds available for the direct delivery of training. This has proven to be very beneficial and has had a positive impact on fire service training, however, approximately 40% of the training request received from the fire service still cannot be honored due to a lack of certified instructors, lack of established curriculum, and lack of academy staff. We are currently operating with only 5 full-time staff and are actively engaged in recruiting and filling the vacancies. The Fire Academy is authorized only 7 full time staff, and we are struggling to meet the training needs of first responders, which is our primary mission.
- **Financial (Special Teams): Financial (Special Teams):** The Urban Search and Rescue Team is currently funded through Federal Grants and special funds generated through TIER 2 Reporting. The USAR Team is statutorily established and has no dedicated funding stream. Additionally, the team's assets are stored in a building that does not meet their operational needs, and the building more importantly is not protected by an automatic fire sprinkler system. If there were to be a fire in the Haz Mat/USAR structure, we could lose millions of dollars of critical response equipment crippling our emergency response capability. We are seeking permanent funding to support USAR and support the lease of a new special team building which would house USAR, Haz Mat, Vermont State Police Marine Unit and our Williston Fire Prevention District Office.
- **Inspections:** We experience a very high volume of purchase and sale inspection requests primarily for the sale of existing condominiums. This comes at a time when we are focused on reducing the turnaround time on all permits. If we do not conduct purchase and sale inspections, real estate transactions (closings) would come to a halt therefore, we conduct these inspections to support the real-estate market and Vermont's

economy, although not statutorily required. Act 181 was signed into law in 2022, transferring primary inspection responsibility from local health officers to the Division of Fire Safety. We have implemented the new program by onboarding 4 new Assistant State Fire Marshals. The Rental Health and Safety program after 1 year of implementation has generated hundreds of complaints. The sheer volume of complaints and managing compliance is challenging to our inspectors and the district managers.

VERMONT FORENSIC LABORATORY DIVISION

Vermont Forensic Laboratory: provides a wide range of forensic services dedicated to providing scientific support and quality analysis for the criminal justice community. This includes examination of evidentiary items, interpretation and reporting of findings for use in criminal and civil cases. The Laboratory performs these functions for Local, County, State, and Federal law enforcement entities as well as the Defense. The Laboratory has 26 staff members and is comprised of four organizational units: Toxicology, Biology (Serology/DNA), Drug Chemistry, and Physical Comparison (Latent Prints/Firearms/Toolmarks). The Laboratory is also responsible for the State's Breath Alcohol testing program which involves maintaining the DMT instruments used for evidentiary breath alcohol testing and training of officers in the proper use of the DMTs.

Vermont Forensic Laboratory Key Budget Issues:

- **Backlog of controlled substance cases:** Due to the ever-growing drug epidemic, more cases are being submitted to the laboratory for drug analysis. Unfortunately, the increase in submissions has not been matched with additional staff so the lab is straining to prevent the backlog from rising significantly. In addition, the evidence is more complex (multiple drugs and adulterants in each sample) which increases the time needed for interpretation.
- **Explosion of drug-related crimes:** In addition to more drugs coming into the lab, drug-related offenses impact submissions in most, if not all, of the other sections. Increases in property crimes, weapons violations, homicides, etc. stress laboratory resources. For example, the backlog of DNA cases has steadily grown in recent years despite analysts working more cases than ever before.
- **Declining revenues from Court surcharges:** The blood and breath alcohol (BBA) special fund is comprised of Court surcharges resulting from DUI convictions. Declining revenues over recent years has diminished the funds available. This special fund is used to support an essential laboratory position and no longer earns enough revenue to cover the personnel costs. This creates a general fund pressure.

ADMINISTRATION DIVISION

The Administration Division is comprised of three sections and a total of 31 full-time staff.

Commissioner's Office/Legal: The first section includes six exempt positions in the Commissioner's Office, including the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, Director of Policy Development, Private Secretary, and two exempt positions providing legal services including the DPS General Counsel and Staff Attorney. This section also includes four classified positions, the DPS Headquarters Receptionist, two Paralegal positions and the Director of Animal Welfare.

Administration/Finance: The second section, led by a classified Director, provides a full range of financial services, payroll administration, grants management, auditing, purchasing, and contract administration for all Public Safety divisions. Budget preparation and monitoring, accounts payable and receivable, purchasing administration, payroll, grant management, and external and internal compliance auditing activities are all managed through a central office operation consisting of 26 classified positions at the department headquarters in Waterbury.

DPS Administration/Finance Units:

Financial Office: Responsible for Federal and State budgeting, monitoring, and reporting and for working with all DPS Division Directors and program coordinators to administer all State and Federal funded grant programs

Policy, Audit, and Compliance Unit: Responsible for working with both DPS staff and its' subrecipients to ensure compliance with all federal and state regulations and guidelines for financial management. Ensures that risk is controlled proactively with appropriate internal accounting, process controls, and coordination of DPS-wide policy development where required.

Accounts Payable and Receivable Operations Unit: Responsible for the daily accounting operations activities including invoice payments and accounts receivable processing.

Payroll and Expense Operations: Provides support to all DPS staff for payroll and expense reimbursement processing.

Procurement Office: Provides guidance to DPS Divisions on compliance with all State and Federal procurement rules and regulations. Oversees contract development and approval, purchasing of general supplies, asset management, and the DPS Purchasing Card program.

Administration Division Key Budget Issues:

- **Improve Technology Utilization:** We need technology to streamline key administrative processes in the face of increasing workloads. Proper technology will not only create efficiency within the Admin/Finance division, but also across all DPS Divisions who must depend upon our Division to accomplish their missions. We are currently live with an electronic PO approval routing process and an electronic invoice approval routing process which is more efficient than previous processes but still requires more functionality. We look forward to seeing VT Buys go live.

A Grant Management system is also needed to manage the granting process from RFP through closeout. Although we have managed to handle grant documents electronically the process is inefficient and labor intensive.