



Office of the Commissioner

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April 6, 2022

The Honorable Julie Rosen
Senate Finance Committee
3221 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Rosen and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I am disappointed that the Transportation Omnibus Bill, Senate File 1154, does not contain most of the initiatives in the Governor's budget, which are designed to enhance equity, efficiency and safety in transportation across Minnesota. The proposed initiatives and appropriations from the Governor works to ensure that the Department of Public Safety is operating efficiently and protecting the safety of those on Minnesota's roadways.

Most importantly this bill does not address the deficiencies that were noted and brought forward earlier this year. The State Patrol will run out of General Fund dollars this month. These General Fund dollars are appropriated for Capitol complex security but in the past year have also been needed to assist local agencies in responding to civil unrest around the State. While the State Patrol will not stop protecting the Capitol and those who work and visit it, it will be forced to shift to Trunk Highway Funds for this non-highway related activity.

Driver and Vehicle Services (DVS) also has a deficiency. It will run out of funds to produce license plate, tabs and other vehicle services in the coming months. This is due to an unanticipated increase in the number of vehicle transactions completed online and by mail in this current fiscal year. This bill currently includes a recommendation, which DPS supports, from the Independent Expert Review to help address the structural issue for this deficiency in future years, but without the necessary funding to fix the current deficiency. If left unresolved, DVS could potentially need to turn off services, as it is turnaround times are already increasing as DVS is forced to leave staff positions unfilled to try and manage the budget within current resources. The funds are available in the special revenue account but need to be appropriated to the department.

This bill does not expand the eligible circumstances for which families of first responders who die in the line of duty can receive death benefits to include cancer or post-traumatic stress disorder that is linked to their service. While I understand this does not seem like a logical fit in the Transportation bill, historically all such programs administered by the Commissioner of Public Safety have been appropriated under the "Admin and Related Services" in the Public

- Alcohol and Gambling Enforcement
- Bureau of Criminal Apprehension
- Driver and Vehicle Services
- Emergency Communication Networks
- Homeland Security and Emergency Management
- Minnesota State Patrol
- Office of Communications
- Office of Justice Programs
- Office of Pipeline Safety
- Office of Traffic Safety
- State Fire Marshal

Safety Transportation budget. The Public Safety Survivor Death Benefit program is already funded in this manner as is the soft body armor program.

We continue to request DVS receive the authority to voluntarily collect Race and Ethnicity Data as part of the driver's license application and that the aggregate data be shared with the Office of Traffic Studies for research purposes. Additionally, this bill does not provide enough funding for DVS to install security cameras at their exam stations. DVS has reported an increase in unruly customer behavior, including physical altercations, and this is an important step to keep our employees and other customers at the exam stations safe. DVS also wants to keep the data it stores in MNDRIVE secure, which is why we requested additional staffing to increase the auditing capacity at DVS. With these audits, we would ensure that those accessing the MNDRIVE system are doing so with the necessary levels of professional intent.

As you may be aware, an Independent Expert Review was conducted by Rick King and his team. I would like to thank them for all the work that was put into this review and believe that the recommendations made will have a positive impact on Minnesotans interactions with DVS. I only disagree with one recommendation from that report currently included in the bill language, fee sharing with private industry and local governments. I believe that Deputy Registers need to be fairly compensated for the work they do; however, I do not believe that the State needs to provide extra income to private businesses and local governments for work which is completed entirely by State agencies. Sharing fees across these various entities will drain state resources by an estimated \$9 million annually. This will limit services that would be provided by DVS in the future.

The Governor's Revised Supplemental Budget did include a few new items that I also want to raise for the Committee's awareness. DPS requested an increase in funding of \$5.064 million for the State Patrol Commercial Vehicle Enforcement, which would allow us to maximize the use of the newly available federal dollars. We requested \$4 million annually to create the Traffic Safety Council to address the increase in fatalities and serious injuries on Minnesota roads. This initiative raised by DPS-Office of Traffic Safety brings together state agencies, law enforcement, and private businesses in an effort to guide Toward Zero Deaths (TZD) in making Minnesota's roads safer. Finally, there is not currently sufficient funding to reimburse local law enforcement agencies and officers for the Soft Body Armor Reimbursement and an increase in funding of \$605,000 this biennium was proposed.

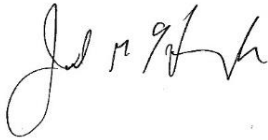
Although we are disappointed that many of our items were not included in this bill we are grateful that the State Patrol Aircraft Replacement initiative is included. This would allow for our necessary but outdated aircraft to be replaced with more advanced aircraft to ensure the safety of our roads and State Patrol pilots. I am also pleased to see many of the recommendations from the Independent Expert Review of DVS and Deputy Registrars included along with the recommendations made by the bi-partisan Salvage Title Task Force. I do want to bring special attention to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives special license plates, which will help fund a reward fund.

I am also happy to see the inclusion of a few policy bills including the removal of all license plate fees for Gold Star Families and the updating dealer inspections conducted by DVS to make better use of the time for both dealers and DVS. A few important policy items were left out of the bill including allowing for school buses to be used in emergencies for evacuations, allowing internet to be considered a utility when applying for a REAL ID credential, and federal updates and reporting needs for the office of pipeline safety.

April 6, 2022

As you review Senate File 1154, I encourage the Committee to review the proposals put forward through both the Governor's budget, as well as the Department of Public Safety policy bills. These proposals are backed by years of experience, data driven analysis, and community input. I would be happy to work with you on this bill to make sure the people of Minnesota get a transportation bill that makes Minnesota more equitable, efficient and safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John M. Harrington". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being the most prominent.

John M. Harrington
Commissioner