

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Senate Government Operations Public Hearings Regarding Law Enforcement Issues

One of the topics covered by Senate Government Operations is public safety. As Chair of that committee I realize that over the past years, many studies have been done concerning law enforcement/public safety in the State of Vermont. A few of the recommendations have been implemented but the more controversial aspects of each study have gone untouched because many would be unpopular with various segments of both the population and law enforcement agencies.

However, we are at a point where we must face these issues head-on. During the 2017 legislative session, Senate Government Operations took testimony and met individually with members of law enforcement. From those sessions we came up with a list of questions and concerns. The committee is now holding meetings around the state in order to be ready for the 2018 legislative session with recommended legislation to address as many of the concerns as is possible.

There are some basic questions that need to be answered by citizens. What does the public expect/mean by “public safety”? Who is responsible for that public safety? Who should bear the cost? According to the State Auditor the residents of the state are spending \$574M on public safety. Is that a reasonable number? Is it too high? Too low? Are we spending it wisely?

We heard that there is inconsistent coverage across the state – some towns have their own departments, some contract with other agencies for coverage, some do nothing and depend on the state police. Have we determined that this is the way it should be or has it just happened because we are unwilling to have the discussion.

There are problems with recruitment and retention; that the professionalism of the officers varies from agency to agency even with comparable certifications; that too often what is meant by coverage in a small town is catching speeders – and that the prime reason for writing the tickets is to balance the budget.

We have seen a general increase in attitudes in the country that vilifies law enforcement officers making them the bad guys. Are we suffering from the same stereotypes – and if so what can we do about it.

They are open to the public and while we would like to focus our conversations on two main areas – “Coverage – who, what, when, where”, and “Administration – including interagency relations, costs, and responsibilities”, - we will listen to all information presented to us. We will hear from as many as time allows. Feel free to also bring written comments.

The meeting schedule is listed below:

Thursday, September 21st

9:00 – 11:30am Bellows Falls – Rockingham Town Hall, 7 Square

1:30 – 4:00pm White River Jct. – Hartford Municipal Building, 171 Bridge Street

Tuesday, September 26th

9:00 – 11:30am Manchester Community Library
138 Cemetery Street

1:30 – 4:00pm Brandon Town Hall
1 Conant Square

Tuesday, October 10th

9:00 – 11:30am St. Johnsbury
Northeastern VT Development Assoc.
36 Eastern Ave., Suite 1

1:30 – 4:00pm Newport
Municipal Building
222 Main Street

Tuesday, October 24th

9:00 – 11:30am St. Albans Town Hall/boardroom/side entrance
579 Lake Road

1:30 – 4:00pm Waterbury State Office Complex
Fox Conference Center, Oak Room
280 State Drive

Tuesday, November 7th

9:00am – 4:00pm Montpelier Ethan Allen room at Statehouse