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Sarah Copeland Hanzas, Secretary of State
S. Lauren Hibbert, Deputy Secretary

February 14, 2025

To: Hon. Robin Scheu, Chair
House Committee on Appropriations

From: Sarah Copeland Hanzas, Secretary of State
S. Lauren Hibbert, Deputy Secretary of State

Re: Assembly Budget Testimony Responses

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about the Secretary of State's Office. You asked that we respond to the questions below in our testimony. We are also happy to discuss our various programs and initiatives.

Are there changes that can be made regarding the delivery of services, use of space, technology, or approaches to efficiently using State resources to ensure that Vermonters are being served effectively?

- **Customer Service:** Our online platforms are becoming the front door to our office. We strive to improve the user experience and functionality of our IT systems.
 - Our ongoing IT projects for more efficient and effective public use are outlined on slide 10.
- **Use of Space:** In Fiscal Year 2024, the Secretary of State renegotiated the lease to a significantly lower cost per square foot.
 - Part of the negotiation included an office renovation which resulted in a smaller footprint with a more functional design. This reduction in office space was possible despite an overall increase in total staff, because OPR has adopted a hybrid work model with fewer staff members in-office at a given time. Leading to a \$50k savings in SFY24, and subsequent years.
- **Efficient use of resources:** Positive reporting to more appropriately allocate overhead by profession in OPR.

What new initiatives are you proposing in your budget?

- **Within the budget:**
 - Paralegal for our municipal services program

- VAN Grant 1.35M
- **Additional Budget Needs since the Budget was prepared:**
 - Voter Guide (1.5 M)
 - Doulas (25K)
 - Mental Health Executive Officer (170K)
 - Early Childhood Educators
 - 2 positions – Executive Officer and Staff Attorney (262K)
 - Setting up the profession (45K)
 - 2 cycles of licensure reimbursement (1.3)

What programs currently pose the most significant challenges? What work has been done to address them?

- **Elections:**
 - HAVA EAC grants are not expected to be renewed and we use them to cover approximately 60% of the cost of the Elections Division. We have \$12.9m and we are able to use those monies for this fiscal year and likely FY27. Without additional federal funds, we will need to request General Fund money.
 - Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) provides our elections team and town clerk important cyber and physical security resources. This support is unclear on an ongoing basis.
- **OPR:**
 - OPR has been running at a deficit for several years. OPR submitted an interim money study. We are gathering more data for further assessment, overall fund health
 - Compacts are good policy but contribute to the challenges.

For any program with significant financial changes, please discuss the underlying reasons for these changes in written and verbal testimony.

- **Elections:**
 - As described above we expect a difference in the level of federal support the State receives.
- **Safe at Home**
 - This program was expanded in 2023. With the new protected groups, we had to expand access. We decided to implement an IT build that is not high cost but is a change from our previous paper system.

Please provide information on the source of federal funding, programs that are supported by federal funding, any relevant information about the status of the funds, and the impacts if the funding is reduced or eliminated.

- **HAVA EAC Elections:**
 - Security \$6M remaining (w/ int.) not expected to be renewed (slide9) – was expected to be renewed, historically \$1M/year with \$200,000 match
 - DOD EASE \$48,000 remaining but all contractual goals met, not expected to renew – was expected to be renewed, historically \$1M/year with \$200,000 match
- **NCSBN VSARA:**
 - Generally, about \$40,000 annually, should renew each year – we have not heard an update about this grant.

- **ASC OPR**
 - \$320,000 for specific IT NGLP projects are incurred, may or may not renew depending on project approval

For all programs, where possible, please include applicable internal performance goals, the trend direction and scale of change, and any external benchmark or points of comparison you use to contextualize your performance in this program area.

- Programmatic and Performance Measure Budget Report is part of the annual closeout process – see SFY24 PPMB for supplemental information

If you are proposing new language be added to the budget, please include a Word document of the drafted language.