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TO: Chair, Representative Robin Scheu; Rep. Trevor Squirrell; Members, House Committee on Appropriations
FROM: Timothy Lueders-Dumont, Esq., SAS Executive Director
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SUBJECT: SAS Executive Summary, FY27 Budget and Justice System Pressures

I. DEPARTMENTAL STRUCTURE & MISSION

The Department of State's Attorneys and Sheriffs (SAS)¹ coordinates Vermont's decentralized justice infrastructure across 14 counties, ensuring public safety through four distinct budget units: State's Attorneys, Sheriffs, Special Investigations Units (SIU), and Victim Advocates.

- Elected Leadership: 28 Constitutional Officers (14 State's Attorneys and 14 Sheriffs).
- Locations: 29 offices (14 SA's, 14 Sheriffs, 1 Central Office/Executive Director's Office)

Established under 24 V.S.A. § 367, the Department provides a comprehensive range of assistance for State's Attorneys, managing budgets, human resources, labor relations, IT support, appellate litigation, TSRP support, and assistance in legislative and policy affairs. Additionally, the Department handles salaries and benefits for the Sheriffs and the State Transport Deputies, and provides human resources and labor relations for the State Transport positions, some policy and legislative assistance, and budget oversight for the State GF monies through SAS. The Sheriffs maintain independent control over their own county law enforcement operations, non-State personnel, and private contracts. The SAS Department is led by an Executive Director, appointed by the Executive Committees of both State's Attorneys and Sheriffs. Executive Director's Office (EDO) provides statewide support.

II. JUSTICE SYSTEM PRESSURES: DATA & WORKLOAD

While the total pending docket count has decreased from the 2023 "high-water mark," the remaining caseload is increasingly concentrated with complex, resource-intensive violent crimes. SAS Attorneys with the highest average caseloads, those with 300 or more pending cases, are carrying an average of 411 cases each. SAS Attorneys, statewide, are carrying an average of approximately 300 cases each. SAS Attorneys are prosecuting 99.2% of all pending criminal cases (19,529 of 19,682 cases are staffed by SAS Attorneys).

Pending Docket Trends (Dec. 2023 – Dec. 2025): Slow progress and Potential Plateau

Although the system maintains a healthy average clearance rate, ranging between 104% to 107% (between 2023-2025), the backlog remains significant due to the complexity of the remaining inventory. Overall pending docket reduction: 14.53% over three years.

- Year 1 (Dec. 2023): 26,119 pending dockets
- Year 2 (Dec. 2024): 23,134 pending dockets (-11.43%)
- Year 3 (Dec. 2025): 22,324 pending dockets (-3.50%)²

¹ SAS: 194 total FTE positions.

² In 2024, there were 13,801 criminal cases filed. In 2025, year to date, 12,803 criminal cases were filed. At the same point in 2024, 12,726 had been filed.

Trial Date Utilization: On the Rise

- 540 trial dates were successfully executed over a 3-year period (2023-2025). 2024 saw a 54% increase in utilization. 2025 volume remains 24% above 2023 levels, marking a new elevated baseline.
- 2023: 143 trial dates; 2024: 219 trial dates (+54% increase); 2025: 178 trial dates (+24% higher than the original 2023 baseline).

The Pending Cases and Backlog: High Volume Defendants v. Violent Crime

- 22,324 pending dockets (Dec. 2025). Composition: 6,096 felonies and 13,004 misdemeanors.
- Homicides: 111 pending homicides (103 staffed by SAS, meaning 93% of all pending homicides are being staffed by an SAS Attorney), a 23.3% increase since 2023.

The most critical pressure point on the system is the surge in the most serious violent crimes. Homicide cases are uniquely resource-intensive. They often require significant expert witness dollars, extensive litigation, and—increasingly—complex interstate extraditions, as well as work with traumatized victims and at-risk witnesses. The trajectory of pending homicides in the Vermont court system shows a sharp and concerning upward trend:

- Dec. 2023 Snapshot: 90 pending homicides
- Dec. 2024 Snapshot: 96 pending homicides
- Dec. 2025 Snapshot: 111 pending homicides. As of Dec.10, 2025: 34 new homicides were filed in 2025.

High-Volume Defendants drive the vast majority of system capacity.

- The 3+ Group: 43.82% of all pending dockets involve individuals with 3 or more cases.
- The 5+ Group: Just 6% of individuals (665 people) are responsible for 26.16% of the entire system's workload.
- Notes and Solutions: Accountability Docket Focus (e.g., *Chittenden*). Homicide and violent crime cases are competing for court time with high-volume defendant cases.

SAS Individual Caseload Averages:

	(Approx.) Average Caseloads
SAS Attorneys	300 cases
SAS Victim Advocates	600 cases
SAS Administrative Professionals	800 cases

III. SAS SPECIALIZED PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Traffic Safety Resource Prosecutor (TSRP)

The SAS TSRP program (2 DSAs), which is 80% federally funded, provides litigation, training, and technical expertise for complex impaired, distracted, reckless driving cases that result in serious bodily injury or death, or other highly-complex/technical cases. System Impact: DUI-related charges account for 17.93% (3,528 dockets) of all pending criminal cases.

- Fatalities reached a five-year high in 2022 with 76 deaths from 73 fatal crashes. Since that peak, fatalities have decreased by approximately 19.7% as of the end of 2025.
- While 2025 saw a slight uptick in fatalities compared to 2024 (61 vs. 59), the overall number of fatal crashes increased more sharply from 53 to 58.
- The 61 fatalities recorded in 2025 remains lower than the levels seen in 2021 (74) and 2022 (76). In 2025, the majority of persons lost on Vermont roads were vehicle operators (44), representing roughly 72% of all traffic deaths for the year. Pedestrians accounted for the next largest group (9), followed by passengers (7) and bicyclists (1). (Data source below: AOT).

Year	Traffic-Related Fatalities (People)	Fatal Crashes	Trend Status
2021	74	69	Baseline Post-Pandemic
2022	76	73	5-Year Peak
2023	69	63	Slight Decline
2024	59	53	5-Year Low
2025	61	58	Slight Increase

Centralized Appellate Services

SAS EDO (1 DSA) manages the majority of appeals for all 14 SAOs.

- 2022-2025 Volume: 100 appeals since Oct. 2022 (averaging 25 new filings annually).
- Success: 81 cases closed; 18 currently active.

The appellate workload reflects a steady intake of cases over the last several years, highlighting the ongoing necessity of a centralized appellate attorney:

- 2023: 30 dockets
- 2024: 21 dockets
- 2025: 24 dockets (thus far).

State Transport Program (Sheriffs)

Facilitates prisoner movements across the state.³ The SAS State Transport Program facilitates high-volume transportation of prisoners across the state. In FY25, the program completed 4,035 total transports. 1,641 transports have been logged YTD FY26 (Note: Reporting lags suggest final numbers will align with FY25's 4,035 transports).

³ 21 of the 25 SAS Transport Deputy FTEs are filled at present, mostly due to OT costs and funding issues.

Chittenden County continues to be the highest-volume county for transports, completing 511 transports YTD (54.6% of its FY25 total). Other high-activity regions include Windham: 238 transports YTD (45.8% of FY25 total); Rutland: 260 transports YTD (55.7% of FY25 total); Bennington: 169 transports YTD (40.4% of FY25 total).

IV. CRIME TRENDS & SYSTEM CONTEXT (2018–2024) (NIBRS).

Offense Category	% Change (2018 vs. 2024)
Shoplifting/Retail Theft	+110%
Theft from Motor Vehicle	+84%
Aggravated Assault	+46%
Murder/Manslaughter	+73%

V. FY27 BUDGET PRIORITIES & ASKS⁴

To maintain the integrity of the justice system under these compounding pressures, SAS requests:

1. **Eliminate Vacancy Savings Targets:** Provide sufficient funding in order to eliminate the vacancy savings that had to including in the SA, Sheriffs and Victim Advocates budgets so that SAS can prevent layoffs and be as efficient as possible in casework.
2. **Increase Operating Expenses:** Dedicated funding for Expert Witness fees (vital for homicide trials), Transcripts, Extraditions, Transport Overtime/Mileage and Per-Diems, for required training.
3. **Strategic Staffing Increases:**
 - 6 Administrative Professionals/Legal Assistants to manage the 800-case-per-person caseload.
 - 4 Victim Advocates to support victims of the rising violent crime rate and victims of high-volume docket— and combat persistent 600-case-per-person caseload.

⁴ NOTE: If accountability docket efforts expand statewide or to other counties, beyond Chittenden, further resources will be necessary.