



COMMISSIONER RONNELL A. HIGGINS

DEPARTMENT OF EMERGENCY SERVICES AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

Finance, Revenue and Bonding Testimony for FY26 and FY27

Good afternoon, Bonding Sub-Committee Chairs Senator Miller and Representative Napoli, Ranking Members Senator Hwang and Representative Piscopo, and distinguished members of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee. My name is Ronnell Higgins and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP). Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you regarding the Governor's biennium capital improvement budget for fiscal years 2026 and 2027 for the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection. With me today are various Department staff who are here to assist in answering any questions you might have.

The Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) is a complex Agency that is organized into six distinct divisions, with roots as far back as 1903 when the agency of the Connecticut State Police was formed. Today, our operational structure is comprised of the Commission of Fire Prevention and Control (FPC), the Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS), the Division of Statewide Emergency Telecommunications (DSET), the Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POST), the Division of Scientific Services (DSS) and the Division of the Connecticut State Police (CSP). Although these Divisions represent diverse responsibilities, we are united by the Agency's mission and the core responsibility of any state's government, which is to provide coordinated and integrated services for the protection of life and property to its citizens. At DESPP and for the State of Connecticut, we do this under the guidance of our three (3) strategic pillars: (1) Operational efficiency, efficacy and excellence; (2) Shared fiscal responsibility; and (3) Ethics and accountability.

As I enter my second year leading this agency that is the cornerstone of state government, I am resolute in my commitment to advocate for investment in the infrastructure and fundamental needs of DESPP. As I have travelled across the state visiting the 73 buildings encompassing 874,674 square feet of our agency, I have been met with countless examples of maintenance deferred for, in some cases, decades. Many of our buildings were built in the early 1900s, and an uncomfortable percentage of our physical space is outdated, nonfunctional or even beyond investment. DESPP is a continuous operations agency- our doors do not close, and our staff are dependent on adequate facilities in which to conduct the lifesaving, emergency and protection activities that are required of us. I believe that the Governor's capital allocation for DESPP this biennium begins to address these decades of deferred maintenance and invests in providing the updates to DESPP's physical plant that are critical to our ability to continue to operate to the standard that is expected of us.



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There is currently not one (1) DESPP facility that is not in need of maintenance and repairs that rise to the level of capital investment. A Physical Plant Master Assessment created and published by a private firm in 2021 assessed the 73 DESPP properties and determined that 20% were of the lowest possible rating category (unsatisfactory), while 16% were rated only slightly higher at poor to fair, with the remainder assessed at good condition, but in need of investment. Allocations requested over the coming biennium will be utilized to begin to address this Assessment and the DESPP capital improvement plan which is driven by beginning the projects most critical to the continued operation of the agency.

Continuous Operation Investments

As mentioned, DESPP is a continuous operation agency and cannot cease functioning. This is especially true in a state of emergency or disaster in Connecticut. Currently, the DESPP inventory of generators is well past its end of life and requires significant time and money to keep in working order. The Governor's allocation of capital bond funding will allow DESPP to replace these generators to ensure that DESPP can continue to provide safety and direction during Connecticut's emergency operations.

Similarly, three (3) of our eleven (11), or put differently, over 25% of our State Police Troop barracks have been assessed to be in such disrepair they are categorized as being beyond investment. DESPP, in collaboration with DAS, is completing a redesign prototype of a troop and is ready to commence rebuild of Troops B (Canaan), D (Danielson) and I (Bethany) in the coming biennium. This prototype modernizes our troop barrack space, making them accessible, prioritizing better evidence handling capabilities and with a heavy emphasis on space to conduct community outreach and engagement, a cornerstone of today's police work that is not currently able to be accomplished at our troops due to their configuration.

Environmental Investments

DESPP operates a fleet of close to 2,000 vehicles. Fleet management also includes numerous garages for vehicle repair and a self-contained gasoline system. This investment allows for necessary upgrades to the Fleet garages to ensure that all occupational safety requirements are being met as well as the replacement of the underground storage tanks utilized for DESPP's gasoline system. The majority of these tanks have reached their end of life and are being red tagged due to environmental risk and need to be migrated to above ground storage.



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Training Investments

The pillar of any public safety and emergency response agency is the training of its staff. DESPP is tasked with not only training its staff, but all law enforcement and fire staff across Connecticut. To accomplish this, DESPP operates 2 live-in academies (police and fire) that operate 24/7 training cadets. This investment allows for the completion of numerous projects to bring the buildings current with deferred maintenance and ensure continued accreditation of the DESPP training facilities.

Additionally, State Troopers are mandated to certify in both firearms and evasive driving tactics. To accomplish this, the Connecticut State Police require a functioning Firing Range, and both the State Police and the POST Academy require an Emergency Vehicle Operation Course (EVOC). At present time, the Firing Range requires a complete tear down and rebuild due to decades of daily use, and DESPP does not have a permanent EVOC course. Currently, EVOC training -for **all** police officers in the state, not solely Connecticut State Police - occurs at Rentschler Field when possible. This is not a long-term or viable solution. Scheduling of training is predicated on availability of the venue due to Rentschler hosted events, does not allow for permanent fixture of any equipment and causes significant wear and tear to the Rentschler facility, as the facility was not built for this type of use. This investment will allow DESPP to site and build an EVOC course to ensure the safety of all law enforcement officers in the state and the public, as well as rebuild the State Police Firing Range to ensure proper and continuous training.

In closing, I would like to thank you once again for the opportunity to speak about the DESPP mission and its capital improvement needs. I welcome the opportunity to address any questions you have for us.