

Remarks of Attorney General Zulima V. Farber
Attorney General's Budget Testimony
Senate Budget & Appropriations Committee
10 a.m. May 4, 2006, Committee Room 4,
New Jersey Statehouse Annex
Trenton, N.J.

Thank you Chairman Bryant, Vice-Chairman James, and members of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.

First, Mr. Chairman, may I again express my condolences on the death of your son. I am truly sorry for your loss. May you find comfort with your family and your friends.

As Attorney General, I am here today to discuss the mission, and the priorities, of the Department of Law and Public Safety.

Accompanying me this morning are Anne Milgram, the First Assistant Attorney General; David Matos, Director of Policy and Operations; Tom O'Reilly, Administrator; and Director of Finance Dan Foster.

Permit me also to introduce to the Committee, Dick Canas -- New Jersey's new Director of Homeland Security and Preparedness.

Also here today are several other key members of my department's management team.

Our Department touches on virtually all aspects of life throughout New Jersey.

On a daily basis, we provide an array of vital services to those who live, work, travel and do business in our state.

We help ensure public safety, protect the public trust and, ultimately, enhance the quality of life for all of us.

On the law enforcement side, our responsibilities include -- but are not limited to -- protecting our state from terrorist attack, investigating and prosecuting public corruption, reducing gun violence and street gang activity, keeping illegal drugs out of our neighborhoods, protecting civil rights, and combating fraud.

Our Department is also New Jersey's largest law firm, handling tens of thousands of civil litigation matters each year in our role as counsel for all agencies and offices of state government.

These litigation-related matters can involve critical public concerns such as: ensuring the well-being of children, preserving the quality of our air and drinking water, protecting consumers, and ensuring the integrity of elections. They also generate revenue for the state via settlements and court-directed fines and fees.

Since Fiscal Year 2003, civil litigation handled by our Division of Law has resulted in judgments, settlements, penalties and other court-directed awards to the State of more than \$660 million -- an average of \$166 million a year.

Clearly, the Department of Law and Public Safety's mission is both comprehensive and crucial, and our work is important in the lives of many people. Therefore, the Legislature has seen fit to provide each year sufficient resources to carry out all of our missions.

But, we understand that the vital services we provide cannot come at unlimited cost and that, this year in particular, the state is facing very tough economic circumstances.

We understand that Governor Corzine's proposed budget for fiscal 2007 is intended to address an extremely difficult time in our state's history.

We understand also the Governor's determination to have New Jersey spend within its means, and avoid mortgaging the future to pay for programs and personnel.

Finally, we understand that tough times do not relieve us of our duty to protect the public against terrorist attack or natural disaster, to aggressively investigate and prosecute criminal conduct, defend our state's laws, ensure integrity in the legal gaming industry, and help young people avoid the destructive path of gang activity, drugs, and/or participation in other forms of juvenile delinquency.

We are prepared to heed Governor Corzine's exhortation to do more with less, and to do it better.

While pursuing a commitment to budget streamlining and consolidation, we have every intention of continuing to provide the array of services we currently provide, and of using wisely the appropriation Governor Corzine has requested to run our Department.

That constitutes a reduction from our current adjusted appropriation.

Within our reduced budget, we are expanding the program Operation Ceasefire because it has proven to be effective in addressing the proliferation of gun violence – one of New Jersey's most pressing public safety concerns.

Operation Ceasefire is currently in use in a two-square-mile area encompassing the border of Newark and Irvington, and in Camden city.

We are proposing to use approximately \$750,000 to expand the program into eight other urban centers where law enforcement data show gang activity and the resulting use of guns are on the rise. Those other areas are: Atlantic City, Elizabeth, Jersey City, Lakewood, New Brunswick, Paterson, Trenton, and Vineland.

In a related effort, we are working with the courts on ways to speed up the prosecution of homicide cases and cases involving shootings.

This will provide swifter justice, and take violent offenders off the streets sooner.

In the Division of Criminal Justice, we are reorganizing and refocusing our efforts to address the priority areas of public corruption and gang activity.

Priority one is to strengthen public confidence in government, and in our commitment to root out and prosecute public corruption. As part of this effort, we are more than doubling the number of investigators and prosecutors assigned to public corruption investigations.

We are also increasing significantly the number of investigators and attorneys assigned to gang activity.

A new gang/organized crime unit made up of about 20 prosecutors and 30 investigators will strengthen our ability to tackle these priority crime concerns.

Of course, strong law enforcement strategies are important, but the future of our state, and our nation, depends on effective prevention efforts as well.

With this in mind, we are allocating \$250,000 to expand an anti-gang program known as Phoenix into schools in urban centers throughout New Jersey.

Used throughout our Juvenile Justice Commission facilities, Phoenix is a curriculum-driven program that has proven to be effective in addressing the menace of street gang activity.

Phoenix works because it provides young people with awareness and education that enable them to discover truths about themselves, and about the addictive and destructive mythology of gang life.

We expect to bring Phoenix into about 100 schools to help young people avoid involvement in gang activity and juvenile delinquency, and make positive, rewarding life choices.

Homeland security remains another top priority, and our new, \$36 million Emergency Operations Center in West Trenton represents a state-of-the-art investment in protecting our citizens from terrorist activity and natural disaster.

The new Emergency Operations Center provides us a secure facility that is equipped with the most up-to-date technology for communicating, and for directing our resources, in response to a homeland security incident or natural catastrophe.

Located on the same site in West Trenton is the newly-created Regional Operations and Intelligence Center.

I believe it is one of the most exciting new initiatives within the Division of State Police.

The intelligence center employs state-of-the-art technology to produce a steady flow of communication between all levels of government – on a 24-hour basis – concerning criminal intelligence and deployment of resources.

Analyzing every bit of available information, intelligence center personnel can identify criminal trends -- which can help to avert violent acts or other serious offenses.

I am also pleased to note that, despite the budget strictures within which we are operating – and despite what you may have heard to the contrary – we will be fielding a new State Police recruit class in January 2007.

As a result of this new class, we project the ranks of our State Police Troopers will be above the 3,000 mark by the end of the fiscal year.

Of course, as I mentioned earlier, we recognize the need to cut costs and realize efficiencies wherever we can.

And we are doing so.

In terms of personnel, programs and equipment, every division and commission in the Department of Law and Public Safety is undergoing great scrutiny aimed at identifying and cutting waste, and eliminating duplication.

Department-wide, we have already begun making tough choices regarding necessary workforce reductions – and we anticipate additional streamlining.

To be certain, these cutbacks are very difficult.

But they are unavoidable in light of our mandate to operate more economically while fulfilling our mission.

In addition to staffing reductions, I am working with Division directors in the Department on "doing more with less" by making better use of technology, consolidating operations where feasible and, in a general sense, working both harder and smarter.

One example: we are implementing a 10 percent cutback in our department's civilian vehicle fleet, and developing a new Standard Operating Procedure that will change – in a way that will result in less cost and more accountability -- the way vehicles are assigned and utilized.

In addition, we are cutting back on the use of cellular telephones.

Recently, we discontinued service to 128 cellular telephones that had been assigned throughout the department.

We are also reviewing administrative operations and processes to determine ways in which we can be more efficient.

One such efficiency effort is the new cost-allocation plan in use for the Office of Insurance Fraud Prosecutor.

An audit conducted in 2005 identified a number of concerns about OIFP time-keeping and cost-accounting methods.

Through cooperative efforts involving the Attorney General's Office, the Division of Criminal Justice and OIFP, I am satisfied we have resolved these issues.

Today, we have in place appropriate accounting and time-keeping systems to capture and allocate OIFP costs.

In addition, at my request, auditors from my office and the Division of Criminal Justice are currently reviewing OIFP cost documentation to ensure our record-keeping is accurate.

We are using technology to better serve our law enforcement mission, and to operate more efficiently.

Two examples of using technology in the service of efficiency are the "e-Daily" system, which is already in use by State Police, and the "eCATS" system, which we are preparing to deploy in the "civilian" ranks of the Department.

Both the e-Daily and e-CATS systems are Web applications that provide managers with the ability to more precisely record and analyze the use of time by Department employees.

Through these two systems, we can use our human resources more efficiently, and ensure that we can devote adequate resources to our priority programs and initiatives.

Looking ahead, we will continue to use technology where we can to work more efficiently, and to realize cost-savings.

It is my goal for this department to be recognized as the national leader in the application of technology in each of its areas of responsibility.

We also propose to address head-on a historical anomaly by which certain municipalities are treated differently in the requirement that they provide local police services. The proposal would realize approximately \$24 million in recovered costs by requiring reimbursement from certain towns that currently rely on the State Police for those services.

I know our decision to require payment from certain towns that choose not to employ a local police force -- based on a formula tied to local property tax rates and property values -- has been the subject of criticism, but the fact is that assessing those towns for State Police coverage is only fair.

Police services represent the second-largest annual expenditure in most municipalities. The system should ensure fairness and equity. The current system does not.

It is difficult to find fairness in the fact that towns such as Upper Township in Cape May County, Fredon Township in Sussex County, White Township in Warren County and Hainesport and Shamong Townships in Burlington County -- to list just a few -- pay nothing for full-time police protection, while residents of neighboring towns absorb property taxes to fund their local police services.

Statewide, 49 towns categorized as "rural" by the Department of Community Affairs pay for their own police services through the municipal property tax, while 58 towns also designated as "rural" by DCA get the benefit of State Police services at no cost to their residents.

I submit the time is long overdue to correct this inequity.

The time is now.

Let me make clear that our plan is not to withdraw State Police coverage from any town now utilizing it.

It is simply to require that some of those towns – those that can afford to contribute toward their own police protection – do just that.

Our Department has many more initiatives and programs worth highlighting, but for the sake of saving time, I will share just a few more examples.

They include:

- A Consumer Fraud Detection Unit – This new unit in our Division of Consumer Affairs has a two-pronged mission – to use undercover and field activities to detect patterns of consumer fraud, and to respond effectively to fraud-related consumer complaints.
- Disaster Critical Incident Stress Response: Sometimes police, fire, ambulance and other “first responder” personnel – people who devote their lives to helping others -- need help themselves. A cooperative effort with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, this program offers crisis intervention, peer support, clinical services and training to first responders experiencing stress-related symptoms.
- EPINet Facial Recognition System: Deployed through our State Police Regional Operations Intelligence Center, Facial Recognition technology analyzes the geometry of the face and/or the relative distances between predefined features such as the eyes, nose and mouth.

It is space-age identification and detection technology. It enables us currently to identify a suspect using images from a variety of sources, including ATMs and video surveillance systems. In the future, we expect to use it to enhance security at airports and other locations by searching a data bank of the facial images of individuals on a terrorist "watch" list.

- Interoperable Communications: Working in partnership with each of the 21 counties, we have developed the New Jersey Interoperability Communications System for disaster response. This system permits police, fire, emergency management and medical response units statewide to communicate with each other -- and with vital agencies and institutions -- regardless of the fact that they each use different equipment.

The Department of Law and Public Safety is a vital, dynamic, ever-evolving agency, and we are committed to using our energy, creativity and ability to innovate – along with state-of-the-art technology – to perform our duties more effectively.

We approach our work each day with an unwavering dedication to public service, and a determination to achieve excellence in all aspects of the job.

As Attorney General, it is my privilege to lead the Department, and to direct the public safety efforts that serve all New Jersey residents.

In closing, I want to thank the members of this committee for their continuing support of the Department of Law and Public Safety.

I will now be glad to answer your questions.

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