

CHAIRPERSON: Senator Catherine A. Osten

SENATORS: Formica, Abrams, Hartley

REPRESENTATIVES: Walker, Lavielle, Dathan,
Horn, Johnson, Rosario,
Wilson, Zupkus

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Commissioner, go ahead. You don't need to read the, your testimony to us. If you could just highlight it and then we will move along.

JAMES ROVELLA: That'd be great. Good afternoon. I've left you a one-page piece of testimony for you. The highlights really are - I'd like to talk to you just a little bit about the first year and the analysis of the entire Emergency Services and Public Protection. The foundation is good, the bones are good, and the people are great there. And I think that's the resiliency that will show throughout my term there is that the folks that work there really have a heart for public safety and they will continue to do the job, whether it's all the barracks for the troopers or whether it's all the five different other divisions that work for there. So I look forward to the questions and the conversation, and if there's anything I can't answer, I will certainly supply you with those answers in a timely manner. Senator?

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you very much. So I noticed that you put, that you put in for a two trooper classes, which I'm really pleased to see. How many trainees does that incorporate?

JAMES ROVELLA: Well, I hope to start with more than -- It incorporates 170 over two classes, so I

may start using more so we have the 110 needed to enter.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Okay. What is your average drop-off? Is it a, is it still around 50 percent, or what is the average drop-off?

JAMES ROVELLA: From the classes, Senator?

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Mm-hmm. Yeah.

JAMES ROVELLA: The average drop-off is around 37 to 40 percent.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Okay.

JAMES ROVELLA: Considering that we're showing at least 10 to 12 that don't even show up on the first day. So we've engaged in several different mechanisms to try to prevent those things. The troopers in the backgrounds unit and the academy are engaged with the 150 or so that are left in the process. So we're trying to show them academy life when we're starting to show them what it's gonna be like.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Okay, good. And so I personally am very supportive of achieving those two classes. I've been worried about the number of sworn officers you have under your command, and so I'm extremely pleased to see that piece. Do you have a five-year lookout on what -- how many classes we're gonna need to maintain services? Can you provide us at the subcommittee a way for us to sort of plan over the next five years? How many classes should we have? What should we be looking at? How are we, how are we gonna manage this?

JAMES ROVELLA: So just briefly, yes, we can provide a longer look for you. But today, of 922 troopers -- That's considering the 28 that graduated

that really are not off field training right now. But today of 136 troopers that could retire, at the end of this year, that number will grow to 164. In July of '21, that number will grow to 231. And it crests at 292 troopers that are eligible to retire in July of 2022. So these first two classes will be the beginning of several different classes that we're going to have to continue hiring.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): And you talk a little bit about PFAS here. So I know that the Environmental Committee is looking at this. Where -- How much PF [sic] do you use of PFAS? Is this something that is deployed by someone who comes along an accident that may have a fire in a car? Is that what you use PFAS for under your --

JAMES ROVELLA: PFAS is used preliminary [sic] for those fires that are somewhat petroleum-based that have explosions, and aircraft, or along the transportation corridors. Presently, we believe there's about 36,000 gallons statewide. The money coming to our fire academy allows us to replace about 6,000 gallons and, along with some nozzles that we use at the eight regional trailers. As you know, DEEP also has a budget proposal that will talk about the take-back program for the state.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): And I'll know that there will be other questions for you here today. How are you in necessary equipment for a trooper's body cameras, weapons, vests, any of those sorts of things? Is that incorporated into the wish, the two classes? Do you incorporate enough equipment to fully deploy those new troopers?

JAMES ROVELLA: Most of the items are routinely budgeted throughout the year. Addressing the two classes, we include for uniforms, vests, training

supplies, the upfit, the vehicle that goes with it. And the only thing we didn't include for were the handguns and rifles, because as the office -- trooper attrits, we will have those handguns and rifles.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Okay. All right. Well, thank you very much. I really appreciate the work your men and women do and I, I'm looking forward to seeing that next generation of troopers come on line. It's always something really important. As an aside, in public safety, which I'm vice chair, we did talk about naming the building at Troop K after Representative Orange. My understanding is, we'd still call it Troop K, but the building would be after the representative. I just want to make sure that -- I know the family would be very pleased. So I'm hoping that that's okay with your administration.

JAMES ROVELLA: Oh, it's perfect. We'd be, we'd be fine with that.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you. All right, anybody have a -- Representative Horn. Up first this time.

REP. HORN (64TH): I'll have to be at the end of the line next time and just keep on, keep on talking. Thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted to -- I think last year when we were talking about the trooper classes, we had some conversation about retention plans and things that you were doing in order to kind of, you know, limit the retirements. And I wondered how those were going and whether you had any thoughts about that.

JAMES ROVELLA: So there -- We can handle trooper retention on many different levels. We can hire classes and work through it. And what I've done is

I've also offered the COO and OPM different strategies to mitigate that. Right now, they're just in the, their conversation stage. So I'd be, I'd be very limited of what I could actually tell you about. But I've offered solutions.

REP. HORN (64TH): Good news. Thank you.

JAMES ROVELLA: Okay.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Next, Representative Zupkus.

REP. ZUPKUS (89TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. Hi there.

JAMES ROVELLA: Yes.

REP. ZUPKUS (89TH): Just two quick kind of follow-up questions. On the fleet cars, so there's a million three in here. Now, you had mentioned about retiring officers, and when Senator Osten asked about handguns and rifles and vests and all that, when officers retire with their cars -- It's on a lease. But do they go if there's a lease that would just get handed to the new officer? How does that work?

JAMES ROVELLA: So as a trooper attrits out or retires, all the equipment that's usual comes back in for re-issue. The car is one of those items, depending on the mileage of the car, the use of the car, it will be either re-issued or retired its outfit.

REP. ZUPKUS (89TH): Okay. So it is.

JAMES ROVELLA: Yes.

REP. ZUPKUS (89TH): Okay, great. Thank you. And then, as far as the PFAS, you said, I forget, 30,000 or 68,000 gallons left? Will that be used up or are you really doing away with it and getting your

new -- I don't even know what your new item is going to be that you're going to be using in place of that.

JAMES ROVELLA: Okay, so we're really hoping we do not have to use it. Because we don't have the replacement as of yet, the new foam to replace it. So we're hoping that we're gonna replace 6,000 gallons. This is just at the regional firefighter school up in Windsor Locks. But we have to keep in mind that many of our municipalities have this foam. There's about 36,000 gallons statewide. So until there's a replacement for those, it'll still be used.

REP. ZUPKUS (89TH): They'll continue to use it. Okay. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Next, Representative Lavielle.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Good afternoon.

JAMES ROVELLA: Good afternoon.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Just a couple of quick questions. I don't -- I was out of the room for a minute. I don't know if anyone asked this, but what's the -- What's the source of the increase in the budget for the fleet purchase? Because there's about 1.3 million there.

JAMES ROVELLA: Let me turn to RoseMarie Peshka, the chief financial officer for an answer.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Thank you.

ROSEMARIE PESHKA: Good afternoon. The inclusion for the fleet is for the trooper training classes for those vehicles that cannot be transferred out because of the mileage.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Okay. That explains it. Just wasn't sure. Thank you. And the other question I have also quick is, as you're involved in the transitioning away from PFAS, are -- Is your agency involved at all in the disposal of it when you get, when you get it back, when you've found it? Do you take care of that, or does -- Is that done elsewhere?

JAMES ROVELLA: We're gonna work hand-in-hand or as much as DEEP uses, needs our help. But it'd be Energy Environmental Protection would be a big part of that.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Okay. So that's not -- that's not really your bailiwick?

JAMES ROVELLA: No.

REP. LAVIELLE (143RD): Okay. Fine. Thank you very much.

JAMES ROVELLA: You're welcome.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Are there any other questions from anybody? Yes, Representative Hall.

REP. HALL (59TH): Hi. Welcome. I apologize, I was out at another meeting too. So if this question's been asked, I do apologize. Welcome.

JAMES ROVELLA: Thank you.

REP. HALL (59TH): And in regards to your, your academies that you're looking to run these big numbers, or big numbers that you need, through, I was wondering if you're staffing needs to be increased at the, at the academy, or do you have enough staff in place right now to get these troopers through at the rate that you're looking to move them through the system?

JAMES ROVELLA: So we expect to have two classes back-to-back, not overlapping classes. Once we get up to the 100 mark, hoping to graduate 38, we will use some additional trooper resources to assign to the academy. Not substantial, but there will also be extra resources.

REP. HALL (59TH): And the line item that you've got in the budget will cover those expenses for you?

JAMES ROVELLA: Yes.

REP. HALL (59TH): Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

JAMES ROVELLA: You're welcome.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you. Are there any other questions for the commissioner? Thank you very much.

JAMES ROVELLA: Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Have a good day.

JAMES ROVELLA: Have a great day. Happy Valentine Day.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Yeah. Same to you. Next, we have the commissioner for the Department of Consumer Protection. Are they here? No? We will, we will stand at ease for -- until we find them. [Chuckling] Thank you. I'm sorry?

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): I was gonna say, maybe Neil can give us an interim report on the update of how things are going up there.

REP. WALKER (93RD): [Laughing]

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Yeah, you look like --

REP. WALKER (93RD): I'm sorry?

UNKNOWN: [Off Mic]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Yes.

REP. ZUPKUS (89TH): Thank you. I guess this might be the appropriate time to ask, because I'm not sure who to ask this question to. As I go through these budgets, I see that almost -- They're all going -- Their personnel services are being transferred over the DAS, with the exception of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunity. Why --

REP. WALKER (93RD): There's ano -- There are a couple of others that didn't get any transfers too. I noticed that yesterday. There's -- I don't --

REP. ZUPKUS (89TH): Oh, in here. I think it's military, which is like a couple of thousand.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Not just in this budget.

REP. ZUPKUS (89TH): Oh.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Not just in this one. There were others. If you -- I'm --

REP. ZUPKUS (89TH): I only was looking at these.

REP. WALKER (93RD): I think, I think the comptrol -- I don't know. I can't remember, but I was noticing and I was like, all agencies are not transferred.

REP. ZUPKUS (89TH): That's right.

REP. WALKER (93RD): And I'm learning that as I go through the lines. So how they chose that, I don't know. But maybe we can ask that of OPM when we get to see them again.

REP. ZUPKUS (89TH): I will. Thank you.

REP. WALKER (93RD): [Laughing] Thank you.

[Recorder turned off]

REP. WALKER (93RD): Good afternoon. [Chuckling]
You're early and we're so glad to take you early.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: [Off Mic]

REP. WALKER (93RD): If you want to turn your
microphone on.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: [inaudible 00:16:59]

REP. WALKER (93RD): And please, whoever talks, make
sure you state your name before your, before you go
so that CTN can type your name underneath. Unless
you want to be an alias or something, you'll have to
let us know. We'll do that. [Chuckling] Thank you.
Go ahead, Michelle.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Good afternoon. Thank you.
Michelle Seagull, the commissioner for the
Department of Consumer Protection. And with me is
Paul Felix, fiscal administrative supervisor who
works with us on our budget at DAS. So thank you
Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative
Walker, Representative Lavielle, and the other
honorable members of the Appropriations Committee.
We appreciate the opportunity to be here, to testify
in support of Governor Lamont's proposed budget
adjustments for DCP.

I just want to highlight briefly some of the work
we're doing at DCP to be good stewards of taxpayer
money. One thing is, through some internal
streamlining and also a budget option from last
year, we've almost cut in half the amount of time it
takes for medical marijuana patients to have their
registrations approved.

Also since that, 2012, we've been continuously
working to provide more online opportunities for

credential holders to interact with the agency. We went from having really no opportunities, other than license renewal in 2012, to now we have 27,000 transactions happening online above and beyond those renewals. We've also been using automated emails in our licensing division to cut down phone calls there by about a third, and we recently introduced online chats in our complaint centers. And that's reduced, early results are showing, about 200 phone calls a month. So I could certainly go on and on about great work we're doing, but I want to keep you guys ahead of budget. So you do have the written testimony detailing the budget adjustments that are being proposed for this year and just want to emphasize, we would continue to use our funds wisely.

So thank you again for giving me the opportunity to appear this morning and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Thank you, and thank you for your testimony. I'm gonna ask, on the, on the funding regulation for recreational use of cannabis, you're saying that you would need one durational and two permanent.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: This is for based on the sort of language that's being proposed this year. And the way it's being proposed is, the first year at the agency would really be spent getting the program up and running. And so, an -- a cannabis equity commission would be created that we would administer, so we would need some staff to do that. And then there is a long list of items that DCP would have to report back to the legislature with recommendations on. So for that first year, we really just need some initial staff so that we can do the work for the Equity Commission and handle the

reporting requirements. If ultimately an adult-use cannabis program is launched, certainly much more staff will be needed to oversee that program at that time.

REP. WALKER (93RD): So basically, this is, this is the exploratory of how it's going to be set up with these, with the people that are set here?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Somewhat. It's basically the start-up costs.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: So the way that the bill is set up is this sort of first year of the program would be creating an equity commission that would then come back to the legislature with recommendations on how to address equity and just issues in the industry. And DCP would go back to the legislature with recommendations on how we would regulate the marketplace. And so the, the proposed bill that's out there doesn't really contemplate a launch of the program until after all those reports happen.

REP. WALKER (93RD): And I'm looking, it says right below that, it has reduced funding to reflect current staffing needs? So basically, OPM giveth and taketh away, huh?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Yeah. So we, you know, agencies were asked to take a look at, are there places within their agency where they could maybe do a small, I think it was like a one-percent reduction, and that seemed reasonable. And so we did have a position. There was a retirement, and we felt like we could move forward without refilling that.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Okay. Are there any questions? Questions? Oh, Representative Johnson.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): Thank you so much, and thank you for your presentation. Could you just tell us a little bit about the application for the Canadian drugs and how, how you're going to navigate through that system? Do you have some information on that?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Yeah. Right now, so there was -- You -- Part of it, we'll have to see how that law ultimately ends up being drafted. But the idea is, can lower price drugs be getting into Connecticut through that and -- So the way we'd navigate it, I mean, the first year, the idea is to bring somebody on to actually develop that. And so the details of that would be worked out there. You know, our key is gonna be, we want to make sure the products maintain the same high safety and integrity standards that drugs that are in the U.S. have. And so we would kind of set up a program to make sure that we continue to have safe products and that it continues to be tracked and monitored in a way where we can continue to ensure that safety for Connecticut residents.

REP. JOHNSON (49TH): I know that a lot of people were very excited about this proposal and I think it would be very, very good to be able to do and so it's falling in your lap. So thank you so much for your good work. We appreciate it.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Oh, thank you. Yeah, we look forward to doing that.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Representative Horn.

REP. HORN (64TH): Thank you, Madam Chair. And thank you for being here and for your testimony. I wanted to ask a question about the medical marijuana. Because we provided a little bit of additional funding for that. I believe, at least in part because people were experiencing some long wait

times, and I wondered whether that was improving or whether you had any --

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Yeah, absolutely. So thank you. We definitely put that money to good use. So we were approaching -- And the challenge, of course, we have is while the funding had remained flat, the number of patients is growing significantly. We're at about, over -- I mean, it fluctuates. It's a little bit over 40,000 patients now. So we've got the wait times down from -- They were probably hovering around 30 days at that time. Now, it's averaging -- Well, as of today when I talked to my drug control director, it was 13 days. You know, it's been averaging about 17. And for patients that are renewing and don't have any changes, it's almost automatic. So we've really -- We've cut that time in half and, you know, we're continuing to see progress.

REP. HORN (64TH): And is that as a result of additional staffing or a more efficient process?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Both.

REP. HORN (64TH): Part of --

MICHELLE SEAGULL: So we've both streamlined our process and we've brought on new staff. And so, between those two things. You know, whenever we come and ask for funding and for more staff, we, we're simultaneously if we see something that we -- Can we be doing our work more efficiently and can that in and of itself solve the problem? This is one where we felt like it was a combination of, we needed people and we needed to take a look at our process. And so we did both those things.

REP. HORN (64TH): Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Thanks.

REP. WALKER (93RD): Senator Formica.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Thank you, Madam Chair.
Good afternoon.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Good afternoon.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Thank you, and welcome.
With regard to the, the 275,000 for the moving
forward on the legalization concept, you talk about
developing a regulatory structure. So the
regulatory structure would be for users, I would
imagine?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: It, it would be --

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): And for growers, I would
imagine?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: For, for businesses.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): And for state, and state
involvement? Would that -- Are those kind of the
three funnels that we're looking at?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Primarily. So one of the
recommendations we would need to make is whether or
not there would need to be more growers or whether
the current medical growers could conti -- could
continue expanding. A lot of it would be around how
to regulate retail outlets, how that should work,
and also the product itself. So a lot of
regulations around how ensuring the product is gonna
continue being safe, but it's gonna be marketed and
packaged in a way where, you know, serving -- I
don't know if serving size is the right word. But,
you know, what you don't want are people not knowing
how much to take. And you hear about these stories
where somebody eats a whole cookie or a whole
brownie.

So there's a lot of requirements in there where we would need to make recommendations on what's an appropriate like THC level, what's an appropriate serving size, how should things be labeled. So there would be a lot, a lot of that. And then of course, how the business is run, how licensing should be done. It goes -- There's 20 to 30 sort of different things we would need to report on and make recommendations on.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Thank you very much. My understanding is that there's not enough supply for the current growers to support the medical demand. Now, whether that's true or not, I don't know. But that, I'm sure, is one of the factors you're gonna take into [Crosstalk].

MICHELLE SEAGULL: We would, we would look into that. And we do monitor that, and that's not actually kind of something we're seeing. What I think sometimes happens is there's maybe a specific strand or a specific type of product that isn't available for somebody. But in terms of overall supply, our producers have been able to, to keep up. And they, they initially kind of chose locations or have, have grown in locations to continue keeping up with demand. But one thing we would look at is, if there's an adult-use marketplace, is that -- are they gonna continue to be sufficient?

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Okay. Well, thank you for that clarification. I appreciate it. I also saw some type of documentary on California who has kind of a glut of, of their suppliers. And would there be conversations about interstate supplying each other? One's short, one's not? That may be part of it.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Federal law would, at this point in time, be a barrier to that. So right now, because of how marijuana is treated as a scheduled one federally, transporting the product in interstate commerce wouldn't be allowed. It's certainly something that could be explored should federal law change. But we would envision for initial purposes to be exploring how can we have an intrastate program that's completely contained within the state.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Yeah. So there's quite a bit to it, and it's gonna be --

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Oh, yeah, it'll be -- It'll be an enormous amount of work. And, you know, we are being very, you know, sensitive to the state's budget situation and sort of saying, we can do it with even this limited staff. And we've been working really hard in getting trained up along the way so that we can be prepared to meet those expectations.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): So, so one of the things that's gonna occur when the vote comes to us, whether it comes this year or next year -- I'm not quite sure when it's gonna come. We'll have to make a determination based on the cost to produce, the cost to regulate, versus the revenue that's generated via whatever the tax is on -- the current tax or an added tax or something. So when I like to vote on these things, I like to understand what those income and expense, expenditures are. And from what you, you indicate your group will be responsible for, it'll be almost impossible for us to have those costs in time to vote in a short session if that comes up. Because you probably wouldn't be able to circle everything around and

kind of understand that. Am I -- Is that a fair assumption?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Well, so I -- The way that the governor's bill and the one that's being proposed and kind of debated now is drafted, it contemplates kind of recommendations being developed this year so that they can come to the legislature next year. And at that point, for next year's session, you would have the recommendations both from the, in the equity commission from DCP. There's also, you know, to get to the revenue and kind of requirements in that proposed bill for reports from, you know, to dealing with taxes and insurance in other industries as well. So there'd be much more comprehensive sort of set of facts to be presented for next year for the potential launch of the program.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Great. Thank you very much. I appreciate your time and your effort. Thank you, Madam Chair.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Yeah. Yeah, happy. Thank you.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you. Are there any further questions? Representative Dathan.

REP. DATHAN (142ND): Thank you very much for your presentation. And just wanted to follow on from Senator Formica's great questions on the expense and revenue side of things. I think one thing that we also need to account for, which would be really important when talking about legalization, in, as Department of Consumer Protection, that you're actually, we're protecting our, our municipalities, our citizens by any increased cost that we might face as a result of, you know, extra policing efforts, effort, other efforts for drug addiction, and also ensuring that our children are well educated about using, the effects of using

marijuana. And I would hope that that would be taken into account with it as a expenditure for any potential upside.

I don't know how you would be looking at that. I know other states have -- We have a few years history between Colorado and in California. So it would be good to have a good idea how those state consumer protections work in other areas. Thanks for your --

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Yeah, we will certainly look at how other state's programs are working and sort of see what we can learn, either good or bad, from those experiences. Good idea.

REP. DATHAN (142ND): Thank you very much. Thank you, Madam Chair.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Any further questions or comments? Are you aware, Commissioner, that there's a bill out in Public Safety that says that the lottery employees should be returned under the auspices of the Department of Consumer Protection?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: I'm not as familiar with the details of that, but I know that's certainly a concept that's been kind of [Crosstalk].

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Are you planning on testifying for or against that on the, at the public safety hearing?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: I -- No, I don't -- I -- As far as I know, DCP, you know, really there's a lot of complications in the overall, so we'd be deferring to the governor's office in terms of sort of overall how gaming is being kind of dealt with in the state of Connecticut. So, you know, certainly if there's a request in that regard.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So I'm certain that the Department -- that the Public Safety Committee is going to want to hear what the commissioner of the Department of Consumer Protection's position is --

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Okay.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): -- on whether or not the workers should be transferred in to -- You don't need to answer that now if you need to check with the administration. But we would like to -- I, I'm the vice chair on public safety also, and I would like to know what your, what the department's -- not your personal, but what the department's position is on that particular policy.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Okay.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So that's the only thing that I have. Anything else? Seeing none. Thank you so much.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Thank you.