

**Department of Law  
FY 2015-16 Comeback Request**

Department:	Department of Law
Title:	Office of Community Engagement

	<b>FY 2015-16 Request</b>	<b>JBC Action</b>	<b>Comeback Request</b>	<b>Difference Between Action and Comeback Request</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$221,405</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$221,405</b>	<b>\$221,405</b>
FTE	1.8	0.0	1.8	1.8
GF	\$221,405	\$0	\$221,405	\$221,405
CF	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
RF	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
FF	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

**Summary of Initial Request:**

The Department of Law (DOL) requested \$221,205 General Fund and 1.8 FTE (annualized to 2.0 FTE and \$219,296 in FY17) to establish an Office of Community Engagement. Additionally, the DOL requested that the Safe2Tell line item be moved into a new line item along with the \$221K associated with this request. This proposal would establish a new line item in the Administration section of the DOL Long Bill that would collectively house these two new employees and the Safe2Tell program. The DOL has determined to not seek comebacks regarding Violent Crime Assistance Team or Safe2Tell technology programs at this time.

**Committee Action:**

The Committee denied this request primarily based on JBC staff concerns that it had not yet received enough information to justify a favorable recommendation. Generally, JBC staff was not clear on the role and mission of this new office. Of particular concern was how the proposed director of this office would be responsible for managing all aspects of the Attorney General's interaction with local communities. Additionally, the timing of the request, January 23, did not allow an opportunity for the DOL and JBC members to discuss the specific goal of this request and its considerable merits.

**DOL Comeback:**

*Departmental Problem:* In addition to providing legal counsel to the State of Colorado through its departments, agencies, offices, boards and commissions, and designated public officials, the Department of Law is charged with protecting Colorado consumers, the public's safety, and water and the natural environment. To serve the public more effectively and with improved efficiency, the Department is requesting resources to establish an Office of Community Engagement.

The Department's citizen outreach and education efforts historically have been via press release or speeches by the Attorney General to individual groups on a particular issue. Employees of the DOL appear on panels; however, these typically occur at conferences or gatherings that are not open to the public/press, or that cost significant money to attend. And when the Department's attorneys bring their expertise to continuing legal education programs, the target audiences are legal colleagues, not every-day Coloradans.

There are dozens of programs, projects, and initiatives that would benefit from further outreach, and the DOL often is the sole source of materials containing critically important information (please see below). To be clear, the communication deficit is not because of incompetence or disorganization. The Department has a talented Public Information Officer; however, her days are spent primarily reacting to time-sensitive press inquiries and assisting client agencies to do the same when a legal matter is involved.

The problem DOL faces is not unique. Several other attorneys general offices across the nation have proposed similar offices to bridge the gap between practicing law and effectively serving the greater public good. Colorado works closely with other state attorneys general offices to implement best practices and align efforts for the greatest impact and awareness. Other attorneys general with community outreach offices include: New Mexico, The District of Columbia, and Indiana. The Arkansas Attorney General's Office has plans to unite existing departments into a similar office this year. It is our understanding these outreach offices have been successful and demonstrate a reliable model to inform and engage individuals and communities.

*The Proposed Solution:* The Office of Community Engagement, through a director and program assistant, will coordinate the Department's current ad-hoc and siloed approach to proactive outreach. Rather than utilize attorneys whose primary responsibility is advising clients, the Community Engagement staff will organize and exploit the information, resources, and knowledge found throughout the DOL. Staff also will capitalize on ongoing initiatives and develop new means to link the resources of the Colorado Attorney General's Office with those who can benefit from them. Possible avenues for enhanced communication include a greater use of social media, additional print resources to be distributed at the local level, a speakers' bureau of subject matter experts to attend town halls and community meetings such as those organized and hosted by state and local elected officials, particularly district attorneys and members of the General Assembly.

The Director of Community Engagement also will be in charge of connecting Department staff and information with outside community-based organizations, not-for-profit groups, other government offices at the federal, state, county and local levels, faith communities, schools, and trade associations, among others. The Office of Community Engagement will be a resource for reviewing and responding to the numerous requests for assistance and information that come in the form of phone calls, letters, social media inquiries or posts, and during in-person visits to the Colorado Attorney General's Office. Last, but certainly not least, the Director will be tasked with listening to Coloradans during these interactions and returning to the Attorney General with recommendations to improve existing programs as well as to address information gaps.

In short, the Department has a large number of talented individuals housed in different sections in the office, each with expertise that exists nowhere else in State government. (The Department

is not proposing a re-organization or the reassignment of existing staff. Rather, the goal is for the Director to be the central “go-to” person for dialogue and response to citizens.) It is in the State’s best interest to leverage this latent talent pool to educate Coloradans in an effort to empower them and improve their overall quality of life. Likewise, there are untapped groups of citizens that the Department should engage to improve upon how the DOL protects the public and to be more inclusive. These groups include our senior citizens, military members, veterans, school-age children and their parents, Native American tribes, rural Coloradans, minority and special interest groups, to name a few.

Current DOL programs and topical areas that can be the focus of improved outreach and cross-department coordination include:

Consumer Protection: StopFraudColorado.gov. AARP Elder Watch. Identity theft protection. Cyber-security. Consumer guides for military families and veterans. Do Not Call lists. Fraud alerts, security breaches, and product recalls. Financial literacy programs for students. Computer safety for older adults. Mortgage fraud and home buying. Vehicle purchases and lending.

Public Safety. Elder abuse. Victim rights and assistance. Medicaid and insurance fraud. Prescription drug misuse and drug take-back programs. Domestic violence. Human trafficking. Safe2Tell and Safe Communities~Safe Schools. Juvenile information sharing. Safe Surfing (internet safety). Teen dating violence. Campus sex assault. Drunk and drugged driving prevention. Marijuana regulation. Community policing.

*Measuring success:* Measuring success of education and awareness efforts can be challenging because generally multiple factors are at work. It is easier in some program or topic areas than others. With Safe2Tell, the anonymous reporting system for Colorado school children, success is measured in the number of tips received and in positive disposition reports (i.e. getting a suicidal student needed mental health treatment). StopFraudColorado can track its impact by calculating an increase in reports of fraud and the subsequent legal intervention that stops scammers. Prescription drug misuse awareness campaigns should result in fewer overdose cases. In every instance possible, the Office of Community Engagement will incorporate metrics to evaluate outcomes so only productive efforts receive future funding.