# **MEMORANDUM**



To Joint Budget Committee

FROM Scott Thompson, JBC Staff (303-866-4957)

DATE March 8, 2024

SUBJECT Department of Law: Comeback on Rural and Federal Prosecution Support and

Recommended Legal Services Rate for FY 2024-25

# → STATEWIDE R1/ LAW R1/BA1 COMBINED REQUEST FOR FEDERAL GUN CRIME PROSECUTION AND RURAL PROSECUTION SUPPORT

#### REQUEST

The Department requests \$1,193,366 General Fund and 5.9 FTE in FY 2024-25, which annualize to \$1,247,226 General Fund and 6.5 FTE to increase staff capacity for special prosecutions including both support of rural prosecution and sharing attorneys with the US Attorney's Office to focus on prosecuting federal gun crimes that exceed US Attorney's Office capacity. This is a modified and combined request from both the Governor's Office and the Department of Law. The staffing portion of the requests and the total amount requested has not changed, however, the combined request is to provide the funding for an attorney team of four, supported by a legal assistant and criminal investigator, with work on rural support, federal prosecution, or some combination of the two areas as directed by the Attorney General. The Department believes it can improve departmental discretion for the two functions to be more responsive to actual work needs and casework.

#### RECOMMENDATION

JBC Staff believes funding this request is a policy decision for the Committee to make. If the Committee decides to approve the Department request, JBC Staff recommends the Committee approve an appropriation of \$799,097 General Fund in FY 2024-25, which will annualize to \$971,767 in FY 2025-26. Major differences between the request and recommendation is JBC Staff is recommending approving the same salary for all new attorney positions and excludes a double count for salaries—\$244,013—in the Department's request. JBC Staff recommends attorney salaries be funded at the amount referenced in the Department of Law's requested salary (\$113,160), which reflects the Department of Law's current average for all similar positions. The other difference between the request and recommendation is due to applying JBC policy that centrally appropriated line items or "POT."

BA1 REQUEST AND RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY								
		FY 2024-25 FY 2024			FY 2024-25		FY 2025-26	
Change	RE	QUEST	Rangi	E MINIMUM	RECOMMENDATION		Annualization	
DESCRIPTION	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost
Personal Services @ Requested Salary	Personal Services @ Requested Salary							
Assistant AG II @ \$113,160	0.9	\$103,730	0.9	\$103,730	4.6	\$518,650	5.0	\$565,800
Assistant AG II @ \$117,876	3.6	432,212	3.7	414,920	0.0	0	0.0	0
Legal Assistant II @ \$81,936	0.5	37,554	0.5	31,213	0.5	37,554	0.5	40,968
Criminal Investigator II \$112,068	0.9	102,729	0.9	74,107	0.9	102,729	1.0	112,068
Subtotal - Personal Services	5.9	\$676,225	6.0	<i>\$623,970</i>	6.0	<i>\$658,933</i>	6.5	<i>\$718,836</i>
Other Costs								
PERA/Medicare		\$88,044		\$81,241		\$85,794		\$93,592
POTS		128,914		135,203		0		151,019
Operating Expense		6,650		7,680	7,680 8,3		8,320	

BA1 REQUEST AND RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY								
	FY 2024-25		FY	FY 2024-25 FY 2024-25		2024-25	FY 2	2025-26
Change	RI	EQUEST	RANG	E MINIMUM	RECOM	IMENDATION	Annu	ALIZATION
DESCRIPTION	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost	FTE	Cost
Capital Outlay		49,490		46,690		46,690		0
Subtotal - Other Costs		<i>\$273,098</i>		\$270,814		<i>\$140,164</i>		<i>\$252,931</i>
Formula Error in Request		\$244,013		\$0		\$0		\$0
Total	5.9	\$1,193,336		\$894,784	6.0	\$799,097	6.5	\$971,767

<sup>\*</sup>Highlighted row indicates positions requested as part of Statewide R1 Federal Prosecution Support as originally submitted by OSPB.

#### DISCUSSION

As initially submitted, both Statewide R1 and Department R1 are seeking to appropriate funds to the Special Prosecutions Unit line item of the Criminal Justice and Appellate division within the Department of Law for FTE.

**Statewide R1** \$599,368 GF and 3.6 FTE in FY 2024-25 (4.0 FTE ongoing) for four new attorneys to be deputized as Special Assistant United States Attorneys (SAUSAs) focused on prosecuting gun crimes.

Law R1 \$593,966 GF and 2.3 FTE in FY 2024-25 and (2.5 FTE ongoing) to establish a specialized team for prosecution support in rural cases across the state, consisting of one attorney, one criminal investigator, and a partial legal assistant.

The Department requests to combine these two requests into one request that funds 6.5 FTE (5 attorneys) for the line item. This flexibility will initially allow the Department to designate one attorney as a Special Assistant United States Attorney, at the direction of the Attorney General based on need, with the remaining four designated for Rural Prosecution Support. As needs change, these designations can be adjusted accordingly. This will enable the Department of Law to be more responsive to and provide critical assistance for rural prosecutions as new and challenging cases emerge, while also partnering with the federal government when and as necessary to support public safety efforts.

#### DEPARTMENT PROVIDED RATIONALE FOR AMENDED REQUEST

This amendment is developed in conjunction with the Governor's Office, Attorney General, and Colorado District Attorneys' Council (CDAC). CDAC has emphasized the need for rural prosecution resources, and we believe this can help bridge those needs more effectively.

JBC Staff understands the modified request to provide the Attorney General discretion on how the new attorneys divide their time between supporting rural prosecutions and assisting the US Attorney's Office with gun crime prosecutions.

#### STATEWIDE R1 EXPAND PROSECUTION OF FEDERAL GUN CRIMES

The Governor's Office and the Department of Law jointly requested four attorneys to work under an agreement with the US Attorney's Office to provide additional prosecution capacity to their office to prosecute federal gun crimes. Under the amended request, the number of attorneys allocated to the US Attorney's Office would depend on the workload of the Department. As the sponsoring entity, the Attorney General's Office would determine the caseload and would direct the loaned attorneys to focus on gun-related crimes. At least one would remain dedicated to the US Attorney's Office, while the other four could shift between that role and one supporting rural prosecution.

The proposed federal-state partnership to enhance gun violence enforcement efforts does not impact other programs or departments within the Attorney General's Office. When dedicated to gun crimes, employees will work directly under the supervision of the U.S. Attorney's Office to prosecute violent crimes involving a firearm under the U.S. Code, specifically felons illegally in possession of a firearm under 18 USC Section 922, but may include other violent offenses involving firearms, including armed bank robbery, armed car-jacking, or other violent gun crimes.

The Governor's Office concludes that "prosecution under federal law keeps the most severe offenders from inflicting further harm on Colorado's communities and makes it easier to address cross-jurisdictional crimes. Unfortunately, the U.S. Attorney's Office does not have resources commensurate with the magnitude of federal gun crimes in the state. In particular, the U.S. Attorney's Office lacks capacity to investigate individuals denied guns due to felonies under state law. This additional capacity will further enable the U.S. Attorney's Office to support the related proposal to strengthen CBI's investigation of known convicted felons attempting to illegally purchase firearms and to investigate other illegal firearm violations as discovered such as ghost guns."

JBC Staff agrees that if additional funding is provided to staff a partnership with the US Attorney's Office, it will succeed at prosecuting more federal gun crimes than if the state does not provide funding for those additional attorneys.

#### DEPARTMENT R1 SPECIAL PROSECUTION RURAL SUPPORT

The Department's component of the request, which is further expanded under the amended request with support from one to up to four attorneys, intends to position the Special Prosecutions Unit to better respond efficiently to executive orders appointing the Attorney General to serve under certain circumstances (i.e. district attorney resignations), provide additional resources and expertise dedicated to rural prosecution assistance, and address the number of open cases handled by the unit on an ongoing basis.

Special Prosecutions is limited in its ability to provide for rural criminal justice assistance, special appointments, and address the number of case investigations without additional staff resources. Investigations and prosecutions are very resource and time intensive. When temporarily fulfilling district attorney roles, first, Special Prosecutions staff must travel and acquire temporary housing in the district. Additionally, the Department staff must ensure continuity of case management, personnel and resource management, and other related investigation and prosecution efforts, as well as providing general leadership and organizational oversight to the district attorney's office.

Some cases, like the investigation and related prosecution associated with the Aurora prosecution, take a tremendous number of resources because the case requires expert consultants/opinions and many witnesses. Additionally, taking a victim-centered approach to criminal cases takes time to build relations and provide victim services. Keeping victims and witnesses advised and prepared for trial requires teamwork by prosecutors, investigators, paralegals, and a victim specialist. Many of the cases handled by Special Prosecutions are organized crime cases that have complex fact patterns, involve a series of crimes that occurred over time, and require multiple grand jury presentations and court appearances regardless of whether the cases resolve by plea or trial.

To provide additional support in rural assistance and to continue to be able to respond to special appointments, the Department requests the establishment of a rural criminal justice assistance team comprised of 2.5 FTE, including: 1.0 FTE (Assistant Attorney General II), 1.0 FTE (Criminal Investigator II), and 0.5 FTE (Legal Assistant). Under the amended request, the Criminal Investigator, Legal Assistant, and four of the attorneys would initially be allocated to support rural prosecution. Then at the Attorney General's discretion, up to three of those attorneys could be allocated to the US Attorney's Office as the rural prosecution workload permits.

#### **ASSUMPTIONS IN CALCULATIONS**

Both the Department's R1 Rural Prosecution Support request and the Statewide R1 Expand Prosecution of Federal Gun Crimes intended to request funding for the attorneys based on the Department's average salary, however for the Department of Law this figure was \$113,160 annually, while the Governor's Office request included a salary of \$117,876.

The Department was asked to expand on its justification on requesting salaries above the range minimum during its budget hearing. It explains that the Department is primarily a large law firm, currently employing 387 attorneys and 65 legal assistants. The remaining positions includes criminal investigators, administrative support, program management, and general human resources, information technology, and accounting disciplines. The Department does not currently employ any staff member who is paid at the range minimum for their job classification. In most instances, because of the nature and sensitivity of the work, the Department does not employ attorneys, legal assistants, or criminal investigators lacking significant experience. As such, the Department will attract and offer employment to those candidates that have a specified number of years with specified responsibilities and, as such, will require a salary commensurate with their peers of similar qualifications.

If the Department is appropriated resources at the range minimum for a position, the Department will be unable to fill that position within the budgeted amount and will be forced to utilize dollars from other vacant positions, assuming they exist, to make the position whole with the required resources.

If the Committee chooses to dedicate General Fund for this purpose, JBC Staff recommends the appropriation include some minor adjustments from the request. The Committee should approve the FTE requested at the salary averages as requested but that all attorneys be funded assuming an annual salary consistent with the Department of Law's attorney request, \$113,160. The other major departure from the Department request is reducing it by \$244,013 total funds. This amount was inadvertently included in the Department's total request by including a double count of the requested salaries through an apparent formula error. For a full summary of the Staff recommended appropriation change, see the table at the beginning of this discussion item.

## → RECOMMENDED LEGAL SERVICES COMMON POLICY LEGAL RATE

#### REQUEST

Annually the Department requests adjustments to the legal rate charged to client agencies, which is used to calculate the final Legal Services appropriations in each state agency based on the average number of legal service hours utilized over the prior three-year period.

On February 22, 2024, the Committee acted on the Department of Law's budget request, including funding for personal services and operating expenses for the Legal Services to State Agencies (LSSA) section of the Long Bill.

To calculate the appropriation to each state agency for the purchase legal services, and the corresponding appropriations to the Department of Law to receive and expend such payments, the Committee needs to approve an hourly legal services rate for FY 2024-25. These rates multiplied by the three-year average hours of legal services provided determines the final appropriations for each agency or program.

#### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

To date, the Committee has taken action on all common policies that impact the determination of the legal services rate except for the package of new common policies proposed by the Department of Personnel. This recommendation assumes the Committee does not adopt the Department of Personnel's request, however, JBC Staff and Department of Law Staff agree the Department of Law can accommodate that change within the rates recommended in this memo. On the other hand, if budget constraints require the Committee to make changes to any of its other common policy decisions it may impact legal services rates significantly enough to warrant an adjustment to the staff recommendation. Staff is presenting a recommendation based on most recent Committee action. Staff requests permission to adjust the rate in the event changes are *de minimus*, but should the rate change significantly, staff will return with updated calculations.

To calculate appropriations for legal services line items statewide, JBC Staff recommends the Committee approve the following rates for FY 2024-25. The shading color links cells between the various tables.

FY 2024-25 RECOMMENDED LEGAL SERVICES RATES	
Attorney rate (see Table 3)	\$142.09
Legal Assistant rate (see Table 3)	\$95.25
Blended rate (see Table 4)	\$133.74

These rates will also be included in the final footnote that details the General Assembly's intent on legal service rates, which the Committee will review with the other Footnotes.

## CALCULATION OF THE LEGAL SERVICES BILLING RATES

Once the cost of operating the LSSA section has been determined through figure setting, this cost must be translated into billing rates that will cover the estimated costs. Appropriations for legal services are calculated using one uniform rate for attorneys and another uniform rate for legal assistants. Staff and the Department calculate these rates as separate components:

- An "attorney" component that covers the salaries and the associated Public Employees' Retirement Association (PERA) and Medicare expenses for the attorneys who supply the legal;
- A "legal assistant" component that covers the salaries and the associated PERA and Medicare expenses for legal assistants who supply the legal services; and

A "common" component that covers other expenses of the LSSA section, including administrative support staff, the Deputy Attorneys Generals that are funded through the LSSA section and supervise groups of attorneys, operating and litigation expenses, licensing fees, and various other centrally appropriated line items (e.g., Carr Center leased space, employee health benefit expenses, etc.) not included in the personnel costs in the first two components.

The following two tables (1 and 2) compute these components.

TABLE 1: ATTORNEY AND LEGAL ASSISTANT COMPONENTS OF THE LEGAL SERVICES RATES						
	A = SALARY AND RELATED COSTS	в = Hours billed	A $\div$ B = ATTORNEY OR LEGAL ASSISTANT COMPONENT OF RATE			
Attorneys	\$46,626,250	472,680	\$98.64			
Legal Assistants	5,315,181	102,600	51.80			
Total		575,280				

TAF	TABLE 2: COMMON COMPONENT OF THE LEGAL SERVICES RATES				
	Total cost of operating the LSSA section	\$76,937,230			
	- Salary and related cost of attorneys	(46,626,250)			
	- Salary and related costs of legal assistants	(5,315,181)			
a	= Common costs	\$24,995,799			
b	Total hours billed by attorneys and legal assistants	575,280			
a/b	= Common component of hourly rate	\$43.45			

The total cost of the LSSA section includes allocations of centrally appropriated items, as well as indirect cost recoveries collected by the LSSA section. The recommended change for the common component is \$0.02 higher than FY 2023-24, or a less than 0.05 percent change.

The hourly legal rates thus computed as follows:

TABLE 3: CALCULATION OF HOURLY LEGAL RATES				
Attorney component (see Table 1)	\$98.64			
+ Common component (see Table 2)	43.45			
Hourly attorney rate	\$142.09			
Legal assistant component (from Table 1)	\$51.80			
+ Common component (see Table 2)	43.45			
Hourly legal assistant rate	\$95.25			

This compares to the FY 2023-24 attorney rate of \$133.30 (6.5 percent increase) and the legal assistant rate of \$97.72 (2.5 percent decrease).

The blended legal rate, which is used to convert the estimated hours to be billed into recommended appropriations for the Long Bill, is calculated using total recommended appropriations and total hours billed:

,	TABLE 4: CALCULATION OF BLENDED LEGAL RATE				
	Total of Appropriations for LSSA section	\$76,937,230			
÷	Total hours billed	575,280			
=	Blended Legal Rate	\$133.74			

The blended legal rate for FY 2024-25 represents an increase of \$5.72 per hour (4.5 percent) compared to the FY 2023-24 blended legal rate of \$128.02. The changes this year are driven primarily by increases related to annualizing prior year compensation decisions and other legislation that carried legal costs. The increased cost for the attorney component of the blended rate was offset by a more modest increase related to the common component of the blended rate and a slight reduction in the legal assistant component.

Approving JBC staff recommendation will result in the follow amounts being allocated through the Long bill legal services line items. The amounts below are the TOTAL amounts appropriated to the line items in each agency, not the incremental change between FY 2023-24 and FY 2024-25. While the final General Fund impact will be included in the JBC Staff Director's next General Fund Overview, it is estimated that 38.2 percent of statewide legal services appropriations originate as General Fund.

TABLE 5: RECOMMEN	DED LEGAL SERVICES ALLOCATION BY C	JENT AGENCY
LONG BILL	CLIENT	FY 2024-25
DEPARTMENT	AGENCY	RECOMMENDATION
Agriculture	Agriculture and State Fair	\$948,130
Corrections	Corrections	3,893,252
Early Childhood	Early Childhood	42,857
Education	Education	1,324,188
Governor's Office	Governor's Office	1,074,738
Governor's Office	Governor's Energy Office, Legal Services	1,421,874
Governor's Office	Office of Information Technology, Legal Services	739,770
Health Care Policy & Financing <sup>1</sup>	Health Care Policy & Financing	2,588,764
Human Services	Human Services	5,964,485
Iudicial	Iudicial	764,757
Judicial	Alternate Defense Council	36,921
Judicial	Bridges	3,568
Judicial	Child Protection Ombudsmen	48,697
Judicial	Child Representation	0
Iudicial	Independent Ethics Commission	90,683
Judicial	Attorney Regulation Counsel	0
Iudicial	Public Defender	96,860
Judicial	Office of the Public Guardianship	57,481
Judicial	Respondent Parents Counsel	8,395
Judicial	Judicial Discipline	147,740
Labor and Employment	Labor and Employment	1,777,056
Law	Attorney General's Office	197,609
Legislature	General Assembly	35,522
Local Affairs	Local Affairs	903,955
Military and Veterans Affairs	Military and Veterans Affairs	62,380
Natural Resources	Natural Resources	8,230,268
Personnel	Personnel	443,450
Personnel	Personnel Board	37,977
Personnel	Risk Management And Workers Compensation	9,634,737
Public Health and Environment	Public Health and Environment	6,195,613
Public Safety	Public Safety	1,168,891
Regulatory Agencies	Regulatory Agencies	17,177,020
Revenue	Revenue	5,083,471
State	State	1,166,414
Transportation	Transportation	2,674,174
Treasury	Treasury	122,197
,	Subtotal Excluding Higher Education	\$74,163,894

TABLE 5: RECOMMENDED LEGAL SERVICES ALLOCATION BY CLIENT		IENT AGENCY
LONG PILI	CLIENT	EV 2024 25

LONG BILL CLIENT FY 2024-25
DEPARTMENT AGENCY RECOMMENDATION

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>The recommendation for Health Care Policy and Financing does not include \$1,493,600 associated with two decision items pending before the Committee.

TABLE 6: RECOMME	NDED LEGAL SERVICES ALLOCATION BY CLIEN	T AGENCY
LONG BILL	CLIENT	FY 2023-24
DEPARTMENT	Agency	APPROPRIATION
Appropriated Legal Servic	es - Appears in the Long Bill	
Higher Education	Commission on Higher Education	50,610
Higher Education	History Colorado	52,950
Higher Education	Private Vocational Schools	34,555
Nonappropriated Legal Se	rvices - Does not Appear in Long Bill	
Higher Education	Arapahoe Community College	2,196
Higher Education	Adams State University	172,425
Higher Education	Auraria Higher Education Center	74,403
Higher Education	Board of Governors	0
Higher Education	Aurora Community College	0
Higher Education	Community College of Denver	23,251
Higher Education	CCCOES	26,994
Higher Education	Colorado State University	414,195
Higher Education	University of Colorado - Boulder	204,842
Higher Education	University of Colorado - Health Science	0
Higher Education	University of Colorado - Denver	0
Higher Education	State Colleges Employee Disability Insurance Trust	9,946
Higher Education	Fort Lewis College	20,108
Higher Education	Front Range Community College	904
Higher Education	College Assist	7,561
Higher Education	Institute of Cannabis Research	1,163
Higher Education	Lamar Community College	0
Higher Education	Metropolitan State University of Denver	188,776
Higher Education	Colorado School of Mines	0
Higher Education	Colorado Mesa University	468,454
Higher Education	University of Northern Colorado	82,205
Higher Education	Northwestern Community College	0
Higher Education	Collegeinvest	0
Higher Education	Otero Junior College	0
Higher Education	Auraria Parking Enterprise	0
Higher Education	Pikes Peak Community College	7,880
Higher Education	Pueblo Community College	0
Higher Education	Red Rocks Community College	20,409
Higher Education	Colorado State University - Pueblo	28,297
Higher Education	Colorado Scholarship Initiative	0
Higher Education	Trinidad State Junior College	20,538
Higher Education	Western State Colorado University	127,169
Higher Education	CSU Global	0
Higher Education	Northeastern Junior College	0
Higher Education	Colorado Mountain College	42,365
Higher Education	Morgan Community College	904
Higher Education	University of Colorado - Colorado Springs	0
	Sub Total for Higher Education Client Agencies	\$2,083,100
Total Al	l Client Agencies (sum of Table 5 and Table 6 subtotals)	\$76,246,994
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