



# CITY OF SAINT PAUL

## ALASKA

### MEMORANDUM TO COUNCIL

**TO:** Mayor and City Council Members

**FROM:** Phillip A. Zavadil, City Manager

**CC:** Aubrey Wegeleben, City Clerk; Stephanie Mandregan, Finance Director

**DATE:** May 11, 2023

**RE:** Resolution 23-14 - A Resolution of the Council of the City of Saint Paul Approving MOA Between APIA and City for Placing a VPSO in Our Community

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**SUMMARY:** The City of Saint Paul (City) is charged with providing public safety services (e.g. law enforcement, emergency medical, dispatch, fire, and search and rescue) per City Code of Ordinance Title 8, Chapter 8.05 for the community of Saint Paul Island. Over the past year the City has had a difficult time recruiting and retaining quality police officers that are a good fit for our community. Approving Resolution 23-15 would authorize moving forward with placing Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs) in our community.

**PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION:** Council has not taken action on this topic before.

**BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION:** In the early 1990s our community was served by VPSOs and around the mid 1990s we transitioned to certified police officers under the Department of Public Safety. Over the subsequent years we have had many police officers serving our community and it has been difficult to retain them.

In August of 2021, the City Council approved a policy requiring all City employees vaccinated for COVID-19. In fall of 2021, the entire police force and EMS personnel resigned due to this requirement. City administrative began to rebuild the department but has had a difficult time recruiting and retaining quality police officers that are a good fit for our community. The police officer turnover has been extremely high.

In combination with high police officer turnover, the City is faced with fiscal challenges due to no snow crab season which has impacted the City's tax revenue significantly. Due to less revenue the City Council approved reducing the number of police officers in our community from four to two. Many police departments in Alaska and the lower 48 have significantly increased the pay and incentives to recruit and retain officers. Additionally, many police departments in Alaska are going to a rotating schedule for officers such as a two week on, two week off schedule. Since January of this year the City administration has been advertising for a police officer position on Indeed, ZipRecruiter, iHireLawEnforcement, Police One, and AML websites. The stats from ZipRecruiter

show that since January the City received 350 views on the posted police officer position resulting in three interested candidates. In contrast, the City advertised for an EMT position on ZipRecruiter for 16 days and received 201 views and 18 interested candidates.

The City made an offer to one of these candidates and hired them. After a lengthy background check, reference check and interview process, the candidate was hired and arrived on island May 1, 2023. The next day they informed me that this was not a good fit for him, and he left on May 4, 2023.

On May 5, 2023, the City informed the community that we would be without law enforcement until we can hire a police officer. City administration requested assistance from the Alaska State Troopers but has not received a response. City administration also reached out the APIA to see if they could provide our community with a VPSO.

**ALTERNATIVES:** Council could choose not to participate in the VPSO program, not have the City Manager sign the MOA with APIA, and continue to have City Administration look for qualified police officers that are a good fit for our community.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:** The City would be obligated to provide housing, utilities, officer space, etc. for VPSOs but this is already factored into the City's budget and provided for potential police officers, so there would be no additional impact to the budget. Additionally, the City would not have to fund a police officer or police sergeant position which could result in an annual savings to the City ranging from \$100,000 to \$200,000 per year.

**LEGAL:** State of Alaska 13 AAC 96.050 allows for placement of VSPOs in communities in Alaska for the purposes of conducting public safety duties. The City's legal counsel has reviewed this resolution and the MOA and recommended some changes to the MOA, which are attached. City administration will need to prepare an amendment to the City Code of Ordinances for council review that expressly addresses the use of VPSO services. This amendment will be ready for council review and approval at the next regular scheduled meeting.

**ADMINISTRATION COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATION:** City administration recommends approval of this resolution.

**PROPOSED MOTION:** I move to approve Resolution 23-15.

**ATTACHMENTS:** Resolution 23-14, MOA between APIA and City, VPSO Job Description.