

Department of Justice HJ0008

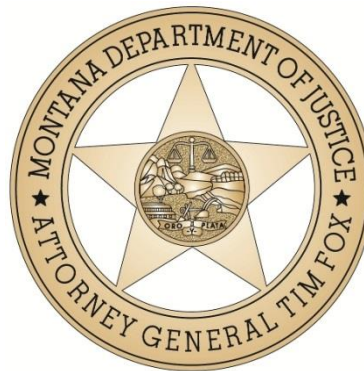
Recommendations for the Legislative Finance Committee

June 9, 2016

For the last 18 years the Montana Law Enforcement Academy has been conducting public safety training without adequate funding in a facility that was originally built to house juvenile females in the 1920's. In 2015 the 64th Legislature passed HJ0008, a joint resolution of the Senate and House of Representatives directing an interim study of Academy funding, operations and campus needs. The final results of the study will be reported to the 65th Legislature.

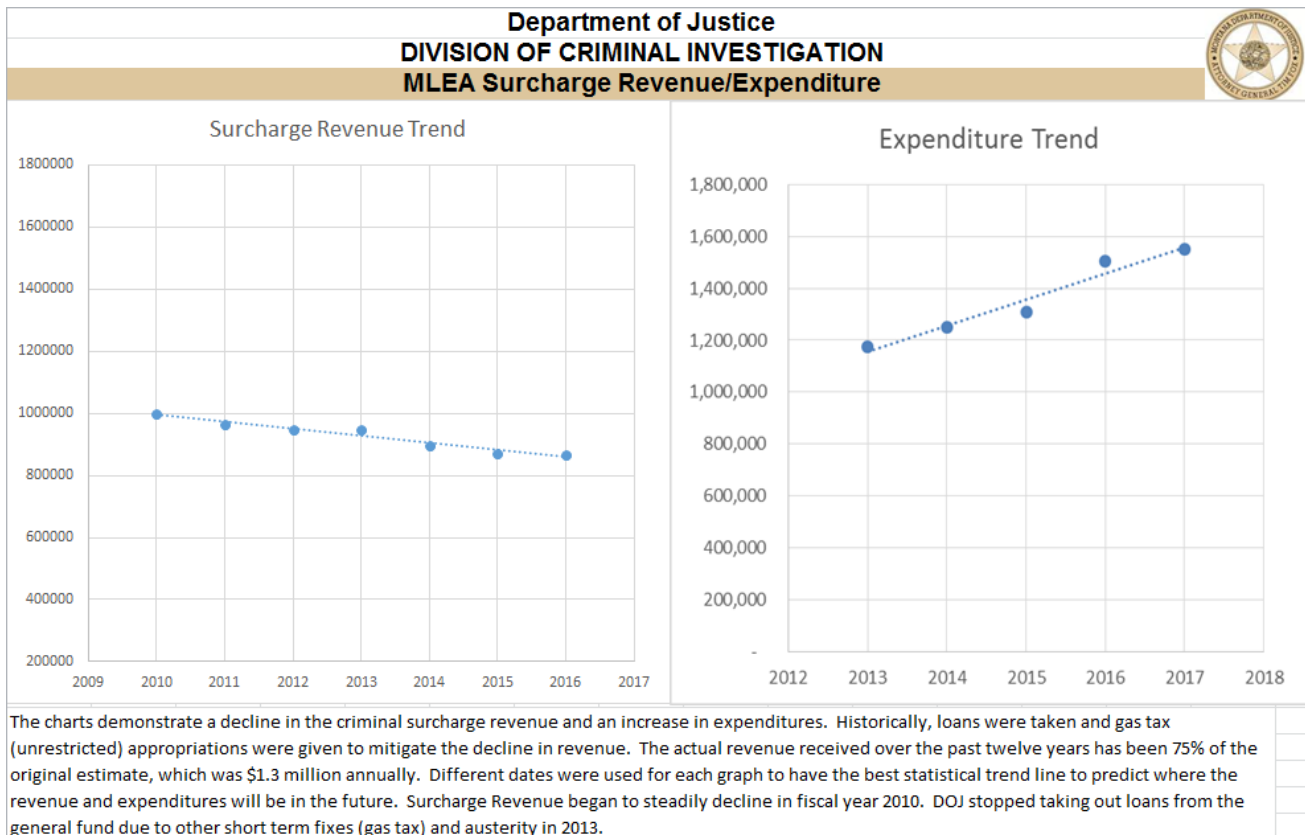
On behalf of our Academy staff, I would like to thank you for your support of the work we do on behalf of the public safety agencies and citizens of Montana.

Glen Stinar
MLEA Administrator



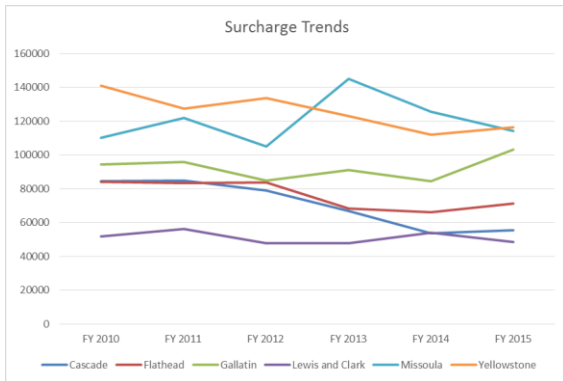
Background

MCA 7-32-303 requires law enforcement, corrections/detention officers and public safety communicators to successfully complete an Academy basic course within 1 year of the date of appointment. Declining surcharge revenues, the Academy's primary funding source, continue to have a negative impact on all aspects of Academy operations. The 2003 fiscal note assumption for the surcharge was that a total of \$1,278,122 would be collected annually. Actual collections have consistently averaged below that. Academy funding has been an issue since 2003. The funding surcharge solution implemented by the 2003 Legislature was a fiscal necessity, but not best practice for a long term solution. For fiscal years 2009 to 2016, the average shortfall was \$136,387. Between 2004 and 2016, there were 9 fiscal years in which the Academy experienced a deficit in spending, a direct result of a lack of surcharge funding.



Without adequate funding, the Academy cannot maintain its aging infrastructure or replace outdated equipment. The surcharge funding mechanism also does not account for the 2-3% inflationary increases that occur annually. In short, expenses continue to increase while surcharge revenue continues to decline. Declining ticket counts among some Montana's law enforcement agencies, the advent of municipal infractions that replace state traffic code violations and the inability of offenders to pay have compounded the problem. Nationally, other law enforcement academies funded through

surcharge revenue also report similar challenges and do not recommend surcharge collections as a funding stream.



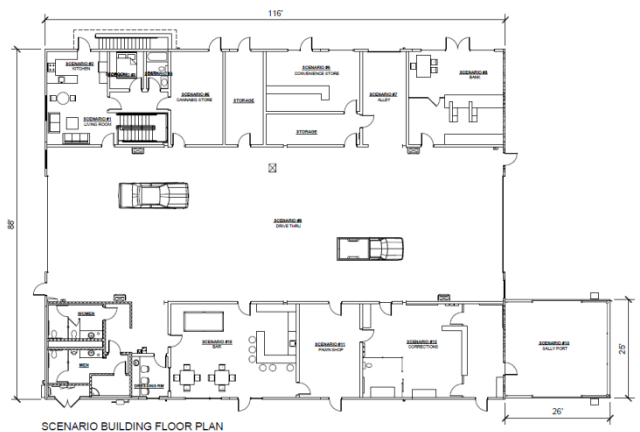
Note: 55% of the Academy’s annual surcharge revenue comes from 6 counties. Surcharge revenue shows a general decline and how inconsistent the surcharge funding stream is.



The Architecture and Engineering assessment and master plan found that 9 of the 10 Academy’s buildings, the majority of which were built between 1920 and 1960, were structurally sound but needed remodeling and HVAC improvements to meet current and future needs. The study’s authors stated that *“When MLEA took over the campus the buildings were in very poor and deteriorating condition due to vacancy and lack of maintenance. The Department of Justice (DOJ) and past and current administration of MLEA have been diligent in their continuing efforts to improve and upgrade not only the educational programs at MLEA, but also the buildings and campus in order to provide a more conducive learning environment for law enforcement cadets”*.

A significant portion of training that occurs at the Academy is outdoors. Recognizing the need for a facility to conduct skills based practical training that is not affected to Montana’s 4 seasons, the A&E master plan also includes the construction of an indoor training facility. This facility is critical to providing realistic training in a safe environment.

All Montana law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders were sent a survey asking what they thought about Academy staff, training programs and facilities. 100% of responded approved of current staff, 97% approved of the training conducted (some would like to see more) while only 58% approved of the dorm and cafeteria facilities. Of those that commented, most indicated the dorm rooms were old with insufficient heating and cooling capability.



Recommendations

Recommendation 1 – The 65th Legislative Session should move Academy funding from Special Revenue to General Fund in the amount of \$1,802,779. One of the goals of the study was to examine and stabilize funding. The General Fund will allow the Academy predictability in revenue while accommodating inflationary increases. Surcharges will continue to be collected at the current rate to offset the actual general fund cost.

Recommendation 2 – The 65th Legislative Session should fully fund the first 7 phases of the Architecture and Engineering Master Plan in the amount of \$12,595,057. The purpose of the resolution was to examine current and future infrastructure needs. To “do it right the first time” all phases should be funded together.

The plan outlines 7 phases;

Phase 1: Dormitory Renovations (4 buildings)	Cost Estimate: \$ 5,023,470
Phase 2: Cafeteria Expansion/Renovation	Cost Estimate: \$1,431,730
Phase 3: New Scenario Building	Cost Estimate: \$3,241,709
Phase 4: Administration Offices Addition to Ohs Bldg.	Cost Estimate: \$594,063
Phase 5: Renovate Administration Bldg. to Classrooms	Cost Estimate: \$1,619,418
Phase 6: Maintenance Shop Addition	Cost Estimate: \$370,673
Phase 7: Cottonwood Dormitory Demolition	Cost estimate: \$314,004
Phase 8: New 30 Room Dormitory	Cost Estimate: TBD
	TOTAL - \$12,595,057

Summary

The Montana Law Enforcement Academy is a one of a kind facility in state government. In 2015, Montana Law Enforcement Academy staff worked tirelessly in coordinating and conducting 39 basic and professional programs totaling 3,458 hours for 1022 students. If each course occurred consecutively and actual training days were considered, staff actually conducted 538 days of training. Nationally and in Montana, the environment public safety professionals operate in is changing. Public perception, mental health, methamphetamine and other drug use issues, use of force and even terrorism have created the need for more relevant and realistic training, not less. Without the training that occurs at the Academy, Montana’s law enforcement agencies would have nowhere to send their public safety employees for the basic law enforcement training programs that are, by law, required as a condition of their employment. Academy basic and advanced training ultimately becomes the foundation of skills these same professionals employ across Montana in keeping their communities safe.

