

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE

Inter-Office Communication

Date: August 15, 2025

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Joseph Lamers, Director, Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance

JOSEPH LAMERS

Subject: Expressway Patrol Revenue and Courthouse Project Allocation

File Type: Action Report

REQUEST

From the Director of the Office of Strategy, Budget and Performance, requesting authorization to: A) allocate \$9,000,000 of increased Expressway Patrol Aids to the Office of the Sheriff in 2025; B) reallocate \$7,500,000 million of tax levy to the Investing in Justice: Courthouse Complex capital project (WC027604) and C) increase the Office of the Sheriff budget by \$1,500,000 million to offset overtime spending deficits in 2025.

BACKGROUND

With nearly 80% of Milwaukee County's local property tax levy consumed by state-mandated services, Milwaukee County advanced a funding request for the 2025–27 State Biennial Budget process that addresses structural inequities that compromise local fiscal capacity and bring Milwaukee County in line with other counties. The proposal emphasized both the urgent need to replace the Public Safety Building through the Investing in Justice: Courthouse Complex (IJCC) project and the County's unique role in delivering costly state-mandated services.

Milwaukee County is the only county in Wisconsin required to provide expressway patrol through the Sheriff's Office, a service that is estimated to cost approximately \$19 million in 2025 (including all fringe benefits and overhead costs) and is projected to reach over \$20 million in future years. This function is handled by the State Highway Patrol in the other 71 counties. Legislators agreed to provide direct state funding for Milwaukee County's expressway patrol services, thereby "creating uniformity" with other counties and freeing up equivalent local resources for IJCC and associated costs.

Expressway Policing Aids

The State of Wisconsin's 2025-2027 Enacted Budget increases the allocation for Milwaukee County Expressway Policing Aids from \$1,023,900 in 2024-2025 (and previous years) to \$19,023,900 in State Fiscal Year 2025-2026 and to \$21,023,900 in State Fiscal Year 2026-2027. This reflects an \$18.0 million increase in 2025-2026 and a \$20.0 million increase in 2026-2027. The State of Wisconsin Department of Transportation has confirmed that the increase will be reflected in quarterly payments beginning in the second half of 2025. An increased payment amount has already been received in Q3 of 2025. Therefore, the amount of Expressway Policing Aids that Milwaukee County will receive in the second half of 2025 is expected to increase by \$9.0 million compared to what is currently included in the 2025 Milwaukee County budget. This file requests to recognize and budget for the \$9.0 million increase in Expressway Policing Aids.

With the increased allocation, Milwaukee County is now reimbursed for approximately the full cost of expressway patrol, including fringe and overhead expenditures that are reflected in centralized non-departmental budgets in the county's 2025 budget.

Investing in Justice: Courthouse Complex (capital project WC027604)

During the 2025-27 state budget process, Milwaukee County requested state funding for its courthouse complex capital project, including replacement of the Public Safety Building and renovations at the Historic

Courthouse. The Public Safety Building was built nearly 100 years ago and does not meet modern needs for supporting the safety of our region. It houses state-mandated services including criminal courts, the District Attorney and Sheriff Offices, as well as ten floors of unused and unusable space that was formerly the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County jails. The Public Safety Building does not meet Supreme Court standards for courthouse operations which leads to slow justice. Renovations are also needed in the Historic Courthouse to accommodate changes across the Courthouse Complex, and to meet public safety standards.

The increased Expressway Policing Aids allocation provides flexibility for Milwaukee County to utilize property tax to support the IJCC project. After increasing Expressway Policing Aids funding in the Office of the Sheriff budget, this file recommends reallocating \$7.5 million of tax levy currently in the Office of the Sheriff towards continued planning and design of the IJCC Project WC027604. Tax levy allocations will support the cost of the project, offset debt service costs (principal and interest), and thereby reduce taxpayer impacts, as intended through state partnership.

The most recent five-year capital plan estimates a total cost estimate of approximately \$490 million for the IJCC project. To date, \$15.3 million has been allocated towards planning and design of the project, within the 2024 and 2025 adopted capital budgets. This \$7.5 million allocation will increase the project budget to \$22.8 million. The 2026 and future year budgets will include allocations for the remainder of the project cost. The project's first significant capital construction request will likely be made for the 2027 budget.

Additional information and background on the IJCC project can be found in files [24-738](#), [24-44](#), and [25-411](#). and File 25-582 which is being submitted as an informational report in the September 2025 cycle.

Sheriff Budget

The most recent 2025 Fiscal Projection for Milwaukee County (File 25-74), reported to the Finance Committee in July 2025, reflected a deficit of \$6.9 million in the Office of the Sheriff, and a \$0.9 million deficit for the county overall. Overtime spending is the primary factor driving the deficit in the Sheriff's Office. A \$1.5 million allocation is recommended in this file to cover overtime costs in the Office of the Sheriff and offset the projected deficit.

In relation to the IJCC project, it is worth noting that the poor layout of the public safety building leads to additional staff time for defendant transport and emergency calls, which impacts staffing levels and overtime for the Office of the Sheriff. Creating more efficient building spaces is a focus of the IJCC project, which is expected to result in reduced staffing and overtime needs.

RECOMMENDATION

The resolution for this file recognizes and budgets for a \$9.0 million increase in Expressway Policing Aids, reallocates \$7.5 million of tax levy towards the Investing in Justice: Courthouse Complex (Project WC027604), and allocates \$1.5 million to the Office of the Sheriff to offset overtime spending deficits.

ATTACHMENTS

Resolution

Fiscal Note

cc: Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Executive
Denita Ball, Milwaukee County Sheriff
Patricia Carravetta, Fiscal Administrator, Office of the Sheriff
Liz Sumner, Milwaukee County Comptroller
CJ Pahl, Financial Services Director, Office of the Comptroller
Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services

Ashley Adsit, Director, SBP Project Management Office