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Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State

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AT A GLANCE

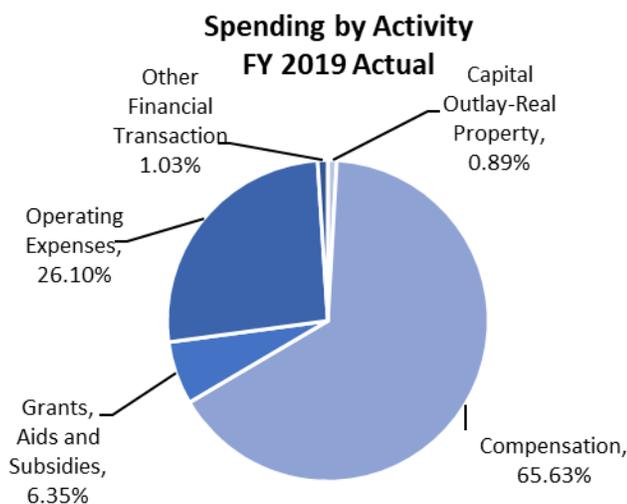
- Over 72,700 new business filings processed in FY 2019
- 3.4 million registered voters in Statewide Voter Registration System as of July 2020
- Support local election officials in conducting:
 - 2,000 township elections annually
 - 900 city elections (2 year cycle)
 - 300 school district elections (2 year cycle)
 - 200 other elections (2 year cycle)
- Just under 11,000 applicants and participants served by the Safe at Home program as of July 2020
- 4,186 Official Documents filed in FY 2020
- Contribute nearly \$22 million to the general fund each biennium

PURPOSE

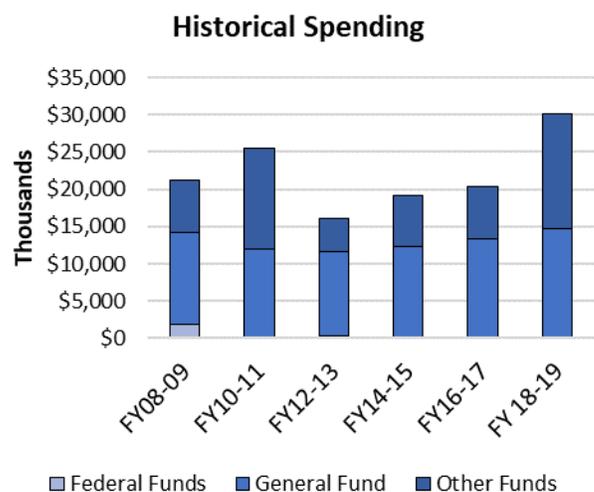
The Office of the Secretary of State is a constitutional office headed by the independently-elected Secretary of State. As the chief election official in Minnesota, the Secretary of State oversees the administration of elections, and promotes voting and civic engagement. The Secretary of State also facilitates commerce, maintains the records of the state, and provides key services for those who fear for their safety through administering the Safe at Home address confidentiality program. The Secretary of State serves on the State Board of Investment, the Executive Council, and other specified boards.

The Secretary of State partners with local election officials to conduct elections that are fair, accurate, secure, and transparent by providing quality customer service and making it easy to search records of active businesses in Minnesota. The Office has made it easier for citizens and businesses to interact with the Office by developing online services for voters, businesses, and those interested in Open Appointments. The Safe at Home address confidentiality program provides a critical service to survivors of domestic violence and others who fear for their safety.

BUDGET



Source: Budget Planning & Analysis System (BPAS)



Source: Consolidated Fund Statement

STRATEGIES

The core functions of the Office are:

- **Election Administration:** Administer and oversee Minnesota's elections
- **Safe at Home:** Administer Safe at Home, Minnesota's address confidentiality program
- **Business Services:** File business documents, record liens, and retrieve both on demand; issue notary public commissions
- **Administration:** Safeguard, record, and retrieve government documents; run the State of Minnesota's Open Appointments process

Election Administration

A core function of the Office of the Secretary of State is to administer and oversee elections statewide. There are approximately 2,700 elections held annually in Minnesota, serving over three and a half million registered voters. In partnership with local election officials, the Office's Elections Division works to ensure that every eligible vote is properly cast, counted, and reported.

The Office partners with local election officials at the county, city, school district, and township levels to conduct elections in the state. Prior to the adoption, use, or purchase of voting equipment, the Office must examine and certify each type of voting system. The Office's Elections Division is responsible for conducting the examination and providing this certification. In addition, the Office provides the backbone of the elections system by developing and securing key election databases, specifically the Statewide Voter Registration System, which includes records for all of the state's 3.4 million registered voters and the Election Reporting System, through which vote totals are reported. At the conclusion of any multi-county election, county canvassing board reports are reported to the State Canvassing Board for certification. The Secretary of State serves as chair of the board, with the Office's Elections Division preparing the canvassing board report, and testifying on the results before the board.

The Office provides training and support to local election officials and has developed online tools, including online voter registration, online absentee ballot requests, and online lookup tools, to provide convenience to voters and cost savings to local election officials. The Office also invests significant time and resources to protect these online tools and databases, particularly in light of the increased cybersecurity threats to election infrastructure and following the designation of elections infrastructure as critical infrastructure following the 2016 election. In 2015, the Office established an IT security team and, on average, the Office's IT security team has blocked over 27,000 potentially malicious IP addresses a month, and over 100 potentially malicious behavior-based IP addresses a month. In 2019, the Office expanded its cyber security efforts by hiring a Cyber Navigator to help assist counties and local governments in protecting election infrastructure at the local level.

Finally, to ensure voters have the information necessary to participate in Minnesota's election system, the Office engages in extensive efforts to provide information to Minnesotans about registration and voting by working with businesses, non-profits, service organizations, schools, and others throughout the state.

Safe at Home

The Safe at Home address confidentiality program is managed by the Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State. The program, which began September 1, 2007, is designed to help people who fear for their safety, especially survivors of domestic violence and stalking, maintain a confidential address. It is open to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and those who otherwise fear for their safety, including law enforcement and judicial personnel.

Participants enrolled in Safe at Home are assigned a PO Box address to be used as their legal address. All private and public entities in the state of Minnesota must accept the Safe at Home address as a participant's actual address per M.S. 5B.05(a). Using the assigned PO Box, Safe at Home provides a mail forwarding service. Safe at Home receives participants' mail and forwards all First Class Mail to their physical address. The Safe at Home program also assists participants with their interactions with third parties should problems arise when giving the

Safe at Home address to others. To facilitate this, staff work with third party stakeholders, such as county offices, utility companies, banks, and schools, to ensure legal compliance and to ensure their business practices accommodate the safety needs of Safe at Home participants. Since the program's inception, nearly 11,000 participants and applicants have been served by the Safe at Home program and the over 1,000 application assistants trained by Safe at Home staff.

Because the Safe at Home address is a program participant's legal address, the Office accepts legal service of process for all participants and staff from the Safe at Home program are available after hours in case of a law enforcement emergency requiring a participant's physical address. If there is an emergency situation where law enforcement needs a participant's physical address, the law enforcement agency can make a data disclosure request through the Duty Officer at the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension. Safe at Home staff are on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to respond to such a request if the need arises.

The program remains one of the strongest in the country; a position solidified when the legislature made it possible for Safe at Home participants to purchase property confidentially. As additional states adopt address confidentiality programs, several states, such as Wisconsin and Iowa, have looked to Minnesota's program as a model.

Business Services

The Secretary of State's Business Services Division makes up more than half of the Office of the Secretary of State, and provides customer service and filing services to those conducting business in Minnesota. This includes all businesses, nonprofits, newspapers, and notaries. Fees for these services add approximately \$22 million to the General Fund each biennium.

The Office's Business Services Division approves and files articles of incorporation and amendments for all business and nonprofit organizations operating in the state. It provides both online and walk-in services for those filing a business, articles, and renewals. Additionally, staff are available to assist those conducting business searches, and those ordering copies of filings and certificates. In CY2019 there was an average of over 1,900 counter customers assisted a month.

The Business Services Division records documents filed under the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) regarding collateral pledged to secure loans, and administers the Central Notification System (CNS) for farm product liens. The Division also serves to file and maintain statewide federal tax liens.

In September 2016, Secretary of State Steve Simon launched the Minnesota Business Snapshot, an initiative designed to serve Minnesotans by providing the public with data and information on the economic and demographic make-up of Minnesota's businesses. The Minnesota Business Snapshot (MBS) is a voluntary, five-question survey offered to new and existing businesses in Minnesota as they file an original filing and subsequent annual renewals or annual reinstatements. The survey was put together with the input of individual business owners, business organizations, nonprofits, and researchers from across the state.

Administration

The Secretary of State's Administration Division serves to assist the Secretary with his constitutional duties, including the administration of the Open Appointments process, certification of Official Documents, maintenance of original Chapter Laws, and service on the Executive Council, State Board of Investment, and Board of the Minnesota Historical Society.

As keeper of the Great Seal of the State of Minnesota, the Secretary certifies the authenticity of official documents, such as acts of the Legislature, and proclamations and executive orders issued by the Governor. All Official Documents are signed by the Secretary and filed by the Administration Division.

The Administration Division is the forward facing division, it communicates with the public, elected officials, and other business and advocacy groups on behalf of the Secretary of State. This includes the creation and distribution of items such as the Legislative Manual (Blue Book) and flag etiquette guide. Items such as these are provided both physically and electronically. Maintaining the Office’s website is a priority of the Office, and the Office has continued to increase the number of services and information provide online. During the last presidential election year in 2016, there were over 3.3 million unique visitors to the Office’s website.

The Administration Division is also where the Office provides information about the over 200 State Boards, Commissions, Councils, Work Groups, and Task Forces that work to advise policy makers and regulate professionals. The Office communicates vacancies through a monthly Open Positions Notice which is sent to over 23,000 email addresses, and through the maintenance of an online portal for Minnesota residents to gather information and apply for vacant positions.

In addition to the work the Administration Division does to assist the Secretary and constituents, the Administration Division also provides support to the Office’s other divisions in the form of scheduling, research, counseling direction, project management, record maintenance, and more.

RESULTS

The Office measures its performance by the indicators set out in the table below. Each of these measures indicates the Office’s strategies are working.

<i>Type of Measure</i>	<i>Name of Measure</i>	<i>Previous</i>	<i>Current</i>	<i>Dates</i>
Quantity	Number of registered voters	3,623,913	3,529,626	2016/2018
Result	Voter Turnout	2,968,281	2,611,365	11/8/2016 11/6/2018
Quantity	General Absentee Ballots Returned by Election Day	614,037	564,011	11/8/2016 11/6/2018
Result	General Absentee Ballots Acceptance Rate	98.64%	98.57%	11/8/2016 11/6/2018
Quantity	Number of individuals served by the Safe at Home Program	3,439	4,351	2017/2019
Quantity	Number of underage children in the Safe at Home Program	1,371	1,646	2017/2019
Quantity	Number of application assistants serving the Safe at Home Program	288	315	2017/2019
Quantity	Number of Safe at Home program participants who purchased real property	39	48	2017/2019
Quantity	Number of new business filings	67,000	72,716	2017/2019
Quantity	Number of business web filings	359,500	410,446	2017/2019
Quantity	Number of business mail and counter filings	69,600	39,976	2017/2019
Quantity	Number of UCC/Tax Lien & CNS web filings	177,000	116,342	2017/2019
Quantity	Number of open appointment applications	3,044	4,871	2017/2019
Quantity	Official Documents filed	3,350	4,639	2017/2019
Quantity	Official Meetings with Elected Officials and Constituency Groups	240	289	2017/2019

The following statutes provide the legal authority for the Office of the Secretary of State:

Minnesota Constitution

Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 5, 5A, 5B, 201, 202A, 203B, 204B, 204C, 204D, 206, 211A, 302A, 303, 304A, 308A, 308B, 317A, 319B, 321, 322A, 322B, 323A, 333, 336, 336A.

(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual FY18	Actual FY19	Actual FY20	Estimate FY21	Forecast Base FY22 FY23		Governor's Recommendation FY22 FY23	
<u>Expenditures by Fund</u>								
1000 - General	6,338	8,285	6,962	7,501	7,292	7,292	8,002	7,502
2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue	3,778	3,899	4,823	13,920	8,346	7,736	8,346	7,736
2001 - Other Misc Special Revenue	7,000	827	9,527	2,000				
Total	17,116	13,011	21,312	23,421	15,638	15,028	16,348	15,238
Biennial Change				14,607		(14,067)		(13,147)
Biennial % Change				48		(31)		(29)
Governor's Change from Base								920
Governor's % Change from Base								3

Expenditures by Program

Secretary of State	17,116	13,011	21,312	23,421	15,638	15,028	16,348	15,238
Total	17,116	13,011	21,312	23,421	15,638	15,028	16,348	15,238

Expenditures by Category

Compensation	7,840	8,539	8,678	9,314	10,309	10,330	10,409	10,430
Operating Expenses	2,262	3,395	11,985	7,183	4,478	4,698	5,088	4,808
Grants, Aids and Subsidies	7,000	827	(163)	6,907	851		851	
Capital Outlay-Real Property		116	677					
Other Financial Transaction	15	133	137	17				
Total	17,116	13,011	21,312	23,421	15,638	15,028	16,348	15,238

Full-Time Equivalent

	81.67	86.19	85.52	96.25	96.25	96.25	97.25	97.25
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(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual FY18	Actual FY19	Actual FY20	Estimate FY21	Forecast Base		Governor's Recommendation	
					FY22	FY23	FY22	FY23
1000 - General								
Balance Forward In		291		209				
Direct Appropriation	13,629	8,043	10,812	8,678	7,292	7,292	8,002	7,502
Transfers In			45					
Transfers Out	7,000		3,686	1,386				
Cancellations		49						
Balance Forward Out	291		209					
Expenditures	6,338	8,285	6,962	7,501	7,292	7,292	8,002	7,502
Biennial Change in Expenditures				(159)		121		1,041
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				(1)		1		7
Governor's Change from Base								920
Governor's % Change from Base								6
Full-Time Equivalents	48.57	52.00	49.97	48.65	48.65	48.65	49.65	49.65

2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue

Balance Forward In	2,758	2,807	9,598	25,269	17,249	13,383	17,249	13,383
Receipts	3,827	10,691	18,853	4,514	4,480	4,585	4,480	4,585
Transfers In			1,641	1,386				
Balance Forward Out	2,807	9,598	25,269	17,249	13,383	10,232	13,383	10,232
Expenditures	3,778	3,899	4,823	13,920	8,346	7,736	8,346	7,736
Biennial Change in Expenditures				11,066		(2,661)		(2,661)
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				144		(14)		(14)
Governor's Change from Base								0
Governor's % Change from Base								0
Full-Time Equivalents	33.10	34.19	35.18	47.60	47.60	47.60	47.60	47.60

2001 - Other Misc Special Revenue

Balance Forward In		829	2	4,416				
Transfers In	7,000		13,941					
Transfers Out				2,416				
Balance Forward Out		2	4,416					
Expenditures	7,000	827	9,527	2,000				
Biennial Change in Expenditures				3,700		(11,527)		(11,527)
Biennial % Change in Expenditures				47		(100)		(100)

(Dollars in Thousands)

	Actual	Actual	Actual	Estimate	Forecast Base		Governor's Recommendation	
	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY22	FY23
Governor's Change from Base								0
Governor's % Change from Base								
Full-Time Equivalents			0.37					

(Dollars in Thousands)

	FY21	FY22	FY23	Biennium 2022-23
Direct				
Fund: 1000 - General				
FY2021 Appropriations	8,678	8,678	8,678	17,356
Base Adjustments				
All Other One-Time Appropriations		(1,386)	(1,386)	(2,772)
Forecast Base	8,678	7,292	7,292	14,584
Change Items				
Business Services & IT Infrastructure Office Relocation		500		500
Safe at Home Program		110	110	220
Civic Engagement and Youth Outreach		100	100	200
Total Governor's Recommendations	8,678	8,002	7,502	15,504
Dedicated				
Fund: 2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue				
Planned Spending	13,920	8,346	7,736	16,082
Forecast Base	13,920	8,346	7,736	16,082
Total Governor's Recommendations	13,920	8,346	7,736	16,082
Revenue Change Summary				
Dedicated				
Fund: 2000 - Restrict Misc Special Revenue				
Forecast Revenues	4,514	4,480	4,585	9,065
Total Governor's Recommendations	4,514	4,480	4,585	9,065
Non-Dedicated				
Fund: 1000 - General				
Forecast Revenues	18,389	18,536	18,588	37,124
Total Governor's Recommendations	18,389	18,536	18,588	37,124

Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State

FY 2022-23 Biennial Budget Change Item

Change Item Title: Business Services and IT Infrastructure Office Relocation

Fiscal Impact (\$000s)	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
General Fund				
Expenditures	500	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Other Funds				
Expenditures	0	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Net Fiscal Impact = (Expenditures – Revenues)	500	0	0	0
FTEs	0	0	0	0

Recommendation:

The Governor recommends \$500,000 for the Office of the Secretary of State (OSS) to pay for the cost of a necessary office relocation as a result of the landlord, the Minnesota State Retirement System’s (MSRS), decision not to renew OSS’s current lease.

Rationale/Background:

The OSS Business Services Division and IT Infrastructure Division have been tenants of the Retirement Systems Building since 2001. In May 2020, the OSS was informed that MSRS would not be renewing the OSS lease, which is currently scheduled to end June 30, 2021. While MSRS has offered to extend the lease by up to six months if needed, the OSS will need to move its Business Services Division and IT Infrastructure Division to a new location in 2021. Costs associated with this required move will vary depending on the potential space identified for relocation, but will include actual moving costs, costs to build out or retrofit the location, and potential IT costs depending on the location.

Proposal:

The OSS has maintained its Business Services Division and IT Infrastructure Division at the Retirement Systems Building at 60 Empire Drive in St. Paul since 2001. The OSS wished to renew its lease that expires on June 30, 2021, but was informed by MSRS’s Facilities Management Committee that it decided in April 2020 that it would not be renewing the OSS lease. While the OSS does not wish to relocate from the MSRS building, in particular because the Business Division has been in the same location for many years and OSS customers are familiar with that location, the OSS must move due to the decision not to renew the OSS lease.

Relocating the Business Services Division and IT Infrastructure Division will likely require significant work to retrofit any space to meet the needs of both the Business Services Division and the IT Infrastructure Division. For example, when the OSS moved into the Retirement System Building in 2001, significant remodeling of the leased space was done to accommodate the public service counter, additional staff, and adding security features both related to the public counter and to ensuring the proper security of the fiscal department and the IT Infrastructure Division. Since 2001, the OSS has made further necessary improvements in the leased space for security and to accommodate staffing needs.

The full costs associated with the relocation of the Business Services Division and the IT Infrastructure Division will depend greatly on the potential spaces identified through the Department of Administration. While there will be significant costs associated with the move itself, in particular the costs associated with moving the OSS server

rooms and IT infrastructure, the bulk of the costs will be dependent on the need to retrofit the space to meet the OSS customer, business, and security needs.

Unlike most government offices, the OSS Business Services Division is a public-facing enterprise with a service counter that serves tens of thousands of people annually. Because of that, any space identified will likely need to be retrofitted to accommodate a public service counter and sufficient security for both IT and fiscal services, as well as more common costs associated with relocation such as employee work space buildout and connectivity costs to state IT and phone systems. Some of these IT costs may be reduced if a space that meets the OSS needs is already within the state system, but until a space is identified, the OSS cannot fully estimate costs. However, based on current OSS service and security requirements, as well as the costs associated with past relocations and improvement projects, the OSS estimates that the cost to relocate the Business Services Division and IT Infrastructure Division may be up to or over \$500,000. These are costs that the OSS cannot absorb, and the OSS has no choice but to incur these relocation costs because of MSRS's decision not to renew the current lease.

Impact on Children and Families:

This proposed item does not have an impact on children and families.

Equity and Inclusion:

This proposed item does not have a direct impact on issues of equity and inclusion. However, in identifying potential new office spaces for the Business Services Division, the OSS is placing a priority on accessibility. The current OSS Business Services Division space is not easily accessible via transit, which has resulted in access issues particularly for individuals with disabilities.

Change Item Title: Safe at Home Program

Fiscal Impact (\$000s)	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
General Fund				
Expenditures	110	110	110	110
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Other Funds				
Expenditures	0	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Net Fiscal Impact = (Expenditures – Revenues)	110	110	110	110
FTEs	0	0	0	0

Recommendation:

The Governor recommends seeks an additional \$220,000 for the Office of the Secretary of State (OSS) in the FY 2022-2023 biennium to accommodate the growth of Minnesota’s Safe at Home program, to provide enhanced security for the program, and to grow the technical training and assistance provided to both program participants and public and private stakeholders who interact with program participants.

Rationale/Background:

The Safe at Home address confidentiality program is managed by the Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State. The program, which began September 1, 2007, is designed to help people who fear for their safety, especially survivors of domestic violence and stalking, maintain a confidential address. It is open to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and those who otherwise fear for their safety, including law enforcement and judicial personnel.

Participants enrolled in Safe at Home are assigned a PO Box address to be used as their legal address. All private and public entities in the state of Minnesota must accept the Safe at Home address as a participant’s actual address and cannot require a participant to disclose their real address. Using the assigned PO Box, Safe at Home provides a mail forwarding service. Safe at Home receives participants’ mail and forwards all First Class Mail to their physical address. The Safe at Home program also assists participants with their interactions with third parties should problems arise when giving the Safe at Home address to others. To facilitate this, staff work with third party stakeholders, such as county offices, utility companies, banks, and schools, to ensure legal compliance and to ensure their business practices accommodate the safety needs of Safe at Home participants. Since the program’s inception, just under 11,000 participants and applicants have been served by the Safe at Home program and nearly 1,000 victim advocates have been trained by Safe at Home staff to be application assistants, helping with the application process.

The program continues to grow with more and more applicants and participants using Safe at Home to forward their mail and keep their address confidential. In 2015, there were a total of 2,777 individuals served by Safe at Home. In 2017, that total grew to 3,439 individuals served by the program, and by 2019 that number had risen to 4,351. A funding increase for the Safe at Home program is necessary to accommodate for the growth of the program. Specific drivers of this need are additional participants served, inflation of postage and rent, the need for additional space, and the need for more modern security for staff and information kept by Safe at Home.

Proposal:

The Office of the Secretary of State proposes a \$220,000 increase in funding for the Safe at Home program to accommodate program growth, to provide enhanced security for the program, and to grow the technical training and assistance provided to both program participants and public and private stakeholders who interact with program participants. This proposal is a continuation of a partially funded proposal in the 2020-2021 biennial budget.

In the event these funds are not received, the Safe at Home program will be unable to maintain its current level of service to the growing number of participants and stakeholders, potentially endangering the lives of participants who depend on Safe at Home to keep their addresses confidential and out of the hands of those they fear.

With the growth of the program, both in participants and the number of stakeholders who interact with participants and staff, the program requires additional resources for:

- **Postage:** As a mail forwarding service, the Safe at Home program is spending more on postage every year with the increase in participants as well as the continued inflation in postage.
- **Space:** The Safe at Home office is located at a confidential address that moves on a regular basis to ensure the safety of both Safe at Home employees and the information housed within the office, namely the confidential addresses of all Safe at Home participants. The office will need to move by the end of FY 2021 to a more secure location to accommodate the growth of the program. Currently, the Office of the Secretary of State spends \$18.00 per square foot, and it is estimated that the Office will need to spend in excess of \$27.00 per square foot on its new lease. The increase in cost per square foot is due to an increase in the average market rate for commercial property as well as the increased physical security needs of the Safe at Home program. A new office with additional security measures in place is paramount to the operation of the Safe at Home program.
- **Modern Security:** Prior to moving offices, Safe at Home will need to invest in and install new security equipment. The security equipment currently used was purchased when the program began more than ten years ago, has not kept up with the demands of the program, and is quickly becoming obsolete. Investing in new equipment will ensure the employees and the information they possess are secure.
- **Technical Training:** The Safe at Home staff provide detailed, technical resources for participants on how participants should interact with both the private and public sectors. Similarly, staff provide technical training to public and private sector organizations that interact with Safe at Home participants. With an increase in participation, there is a need for additional funding to meet the increased demand for this technical training work.

These additional resources are necessary in order to accommodate the growth of the program in a safe and secure manner. This is not a new initiative, but a necessary funding increase to ensure that Minnesotans continue to receive the level of service they have come to expect and rely on from the Safe at Home program.

This proposal will help ensure a safe and secure environment for staff and the private information participants trust the office to maintain, ensuring Safe at Home continues to be a viable public safety tool.

Impact on Children and Families:

As of 2019, the Safe at Home program had over 1,600 children actively enrolled in the program. Like the adults in the program, enrollment in the Safe at Home program provides protection for children by allowing them to participate fully in school, extracurricular activities, and the community as a whole without risking their physical security by having to disclose their physical address. The Safe at Home office regularly works with students and schools to make sure school records are handled properly, so that a student's safety is not risked when enrolling or transferring schools.

Equity and Inclusion:

The Safe at Home program works with a very diverse population in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. This request specifically does not directly impact any identified groups, nor is it aimed at reducing or eliminating any disparities for identified groups. However, this request will ensure that the Safe at Home program continues providing quality service to participants and those who interact with them. It will also result in a safer, more secure environment for the employees and information the office has been trusted to keep.

Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State

FY 2022-23 Biennial Budget Change Item

Change Item Title: Civic Engagement and Youth Outreach

Fiscal Impact (\$000s)	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
General Fund				
Expenditures	100	100	100	100
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Other Funds				
Expenditures	0	0	0	0
Revenues	0	0	0	0
Net Fiscal Impact = (Expenditures – Revenues)	100	100	100	100
FTEs	1	1	1	1

Recommendation:

The Governor recommends \$200,000 for the Office of the Secretary of State (OSS) to support a permanent civic engagement and youth outreach program. These funds would be used to support a full-time civic engagement and youth outreach position in the Office of Secretary of State.

Rationale/Background:

In 2016 and 2018, Minnesota led the nation in voter participation, realizing a 74.72% rate of voting among eligible Minnesotans in 2016 and a 64.25% rate of voting among eligible Minnesotans in 2018. However, in the 2016 election, with almost 75% of eligible Minnesotans voting, only approximately 50% of eligible Minnesotans between ages 18 and 24 voted. The gap in participation is even starker in non-presidential election years. In order to address this persistent gap in youth civic engagement and participation, the Office seeks funds to expand the outreach and education work of the Office. This expansion will include funds to hire a full-time staff person to focus on youth outreach and civic engagement. Studies show that making students more knowledgeable and comfortable with the process of voting makes them more likely to vote when they become eligible, and that voters who begin voting when they are first eligible are more likely to make voting a life-long pursuit.

Providing education and outreach to future voters fits squarely within the responsibility of the Office to provide voter information to the public as delineated in Minn. Stat. § 204B.27. During the past three general election years, the Office has engaged in education and outreach work with youth at the secondary and post-secondary level, as well as other communities in Minnesota. However, at the beginning of each election year, the office receives feedback that the Office is only engaging with students and various other communities just prior to elections. A full time, year-round youth and civic engagement staff would allow the outreach and education program to function every year, rather than every other year. This position would be able to work with secondary schools and universities to engage students in both general election years and odd-year elections. Currently, the Office is only engaged with students in general election years, meaning that the Office is only working to educate and engage with every other graduating high school class. Expanding the voter education and outreach program beyond general election years would allow the Office to engage in consistent and ongoing youth and civic outreach and education, which will provide youth in Minnesota with the resources and tools to become lifelong voters.

Proposal:

This proposal includes funding for one voter outreach staff (1 FTE) focused on youth civics and voter education. This would allow the Office to expand to full-time the youth education programs that the Office is currently engaged in only in the statewide general election years and only in the few months leading up to the election. A

full-time voter outreach staff would provide outreach and educational resources to high schools, civic groups, and nonprofits working on youth civic and voter education.

In addition, this funding would support the expansion of the necessary ancillary outreach materials and communication, including the materials necessary to support an expansion of the Students Vote high school mock election program. The Students Vote program started in 2016, when over 96,000 high school students from 281 schools across Minnesota cast their vote and were counted in the first Students Vote mock election. In addition to conducting a mock election that teaches students about the voting process, the Students Vote program creates resources that inform classroom discussions on civics and voter education. Creating a full-time youth outreach program within the Office of the Secretary of State will allow the Office to engage with students on an ongoing basis and ensure that students have the tools to become educated and lifelong voters.

Impact on Children and Families:

This proposal would impact all Minnesotans, but would have a particular impact on youth in Minnesota and would seek to address the age disparity in voter participation in Minnesota’s elections. This program would partner with schools, youth organizations, and other civic engagement organizations to ensure youth are ready to participate in the electoral process and have the tools necessary to engage in civic life as a voter.

Equity and Inclusion:

In addition to age disparities in participation, voter outreach efforts of the Office of the Secretary of State also seek to address the participation disparities among communities of color, persons with disabilities, veterans, and new citizen communities. In developing voter education and outreach programs to attempt to address these disparities, the Office partners with both public and private organizations serving the targeted communities.