



Legislative Council Staff

Nonpartisan Services for Colorado's Legislature

Memorandum

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TO: Agency Fiscal Note Coordinators

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SUBJECT: 2026 Fiscal Notes Common Policies

Summary

This memorandum describes the common policies for submitting a fiscal note response to the Legislative Council Staff, and the standard costs to be used when estimating the fiscal impact of legislation considered during the 2026 legislative session. These common policies apply to any bill proposed during the 2025 interim, as well as during any special session of the General Assembly after their publication. This document and a summarized version is also available online on the [fiscal notes page](#) of the Legislative Council Staff website. Additional information is available on [fiscal note considerations for bills with criminal justice system impacts](#).

Fiscal Note Process Overview

Purpose and Use

The fiscal note is a decision-making tool for members of the General Assembly. It provides an independent analysis of the estimated state and local government impacts of a bill based on information received from affected agencies and other sources. As such, it represents an official estimate of the legislature, not the executive branch. Fiscal notes serve to inform, but are not legally binding documents.

Confidentiality

All draft bills and amendments sent to affected agencies for fiscal review are confidential until introduced. Agency staff are expected to respect this confidentiality and review the bill only for fiscal impact. Agency staff that receive confidential bill drafts should never discuss the drafts with people outside of the agency, except they may coordinate their response with the other



agencies that were canvassed on the bill. In-house review should be limited to people working on the estimated fiscal impact.

If Legislative Council Staff does not receive permission from the bill sponsors to share a confidential bill draft, or if there are concerns about an agency or organization maintaining confidentiality, some or all agencies may be canvassed after a bill is introduced and publicly available. In such cases, agency feedback may be incorporated into a revised fiscal note if there are time constraints when publishing the initial fiscal note for its first committee hearing.

Session Deadlines

To be useful, fiscal notes must be available before a bill is heard in committee. Legislative Council Staff strives to provide a fiscal note to the bill sponsor at least 48 hours before the hearing and to the committee at least 24 hours before the hearing. Legislative Council Staff will communicate deadlines for agencies to provide fiscal note responses based on the scheduled or anticipated committee date. In situations where the scheduling of bills in committees limits the time available for fiscal analysts to review the work of executive branch agencies and to complete their own analysis, agencies may be asked to send preliminary information or a partial response. Agency staff should notify fiscal note staff when original deadlines cannot be met. Likewise, fiscal note staff will notify affected agencies when deadlines change as soon as that information becomes known.

Revising Fiscal Notes

Fiscal notes are revised as needed in order to provide an updated estimate of a bill's impact at each stage of the process. Agency staff are asked to identify when new information substantially changes a prior response or when amendments change the fiscal impact of a bill. All adopted amendments are available online and can be found by searching for the respective bill number on the [bill search page](#) of the General Assembly website. Agency staff that were not initially canvassed on a bill are welcome to provide information as well.

Agency Fiscal Note Responses

At a minimum, an agency's fiscal note response should include the following items:

- an explanation of the sections of the bill driving the fiscal impact;
- an estimate of the least-cost option to implement the bill;
- justification for the use of any non-standardized costs, including any relevant supporting materials;
- the statutory name of all funds affected;



- the assumptions made to arrive at the estimate, including the reasons for using those assumptions, if applicable;
- a separate Excel-based worksheet showing all calculations;
- a description of any workload impacts not requiring an appropriation; and
- a description of the line items impacted or calculations showing the changes to any line items.

It is important that each cost estimate be fully justified in a narrative accompanying the agency's worksheet, including the data and evidence used. This is especially true for estimates of future costs to implement a bill that rely on assumptions made with limited or no data. Impacts that are not justified will not be included in the fiscal note. Please submit the agency's narrative response as a Word or PDF document. A separate Excel spreadsheet should be used to show calculations; please do not send calculations in PDF form. If a bill has no fiscal impact, please include the basis for such assessment using the response form or a brief email. A standard response template and worksheet will be provided. Agencies are strongly encouraged to use these forms.

Departmental Differences

The fiscal note provides an objective analysis of the bill's fiscal impact using information provided by the department and other relevant information gathered by the fiscal analyst. In some cases, the Legislative Council Staff analysis and conclusions will differ from the information submitted by one or more affected agencies. Legislative Council Staff will attempt to resolve any significant differences with agency staff prior to publishing a fiscal note and, if necessary, include reasonable departmental differences in the fiscal note to show the department's estimate and explain why it was not used in the fiscal note.

Technical Errors and Omissions

Generally speaking, fiscal notes do not describe any potential technical errors or omissions related to a bill. Agency staff may provide information related to such issues in their fiscal note response, but they may find it more useful to share that information with the agency's legislative liaison, especially if the issue implies a need to seek changes to the bill. Technical issues with a bill will be discussed in the fiscal note only to the extent they impact the fiscal estimates or assumptions used.



Common Policies for Fiscal Note Responses

Legislative Council Staff has adopted the following common policies as the basis for estimating the fiscal impact of proposed legislation considered during the 2026 session. An agency must provide justification for any costs to support a particular program that differ from these policies.

Personal Services Expenses

Wages and FTE

Wages should be identified for each new FTE based on the state personnel system or as contract personal services in accordance with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) definition of an independent contractor. New FTE requirements should be rounded to the nearest 0.1 FTE. For example, 0.25 FTE should be shown as 0.3 FTE. As a minimum threshold, FTE for regular state employees will not be included for workload that is less than 208 hours, or 0.1 FTE, in a fiscal year.

FTE is an expression of the number of months of salary paid in a given fiscal year. This policy applies to salary, all Public Employees' Retirement Association (PERA) contributions, and all insurances. Fiscal notes do not account for General Fund paydate shift for new employees, based on current practices for most state agencies and clarifications to state law regarding the use of biweekly pay. However, fiscal notes will assume a one-month lag between a bill's effective date and the start date for any new employees to account for the time needed to complete the hiring process, except for cases when deadlines necessitate an expedited hire. This one-month lag at a bill's effective date applies to FTE paid from all fund sources (General Fund, cash funds, and federal funds). A hiring lag will not be assumed for new FTE that start later (i.e., phased in after the bill's effective date or in a future fiscal year) and the fiscal note will estimate their start date based on the requirements of the bill.

Pay Plan and Salaries

Personal services cost estimates will be based upon entry-level wages for positions effective July 1, 2025, as published in the Department of Personnel and Administration (DPA) Pay Plan or the applicable department exempt salary schedule for FY 2025-26. Any wage costs above entry level will require sufficient justification.¹

¹ Section 24-50-104 (1)(f), C.R.S.



Agencies that do not use the DPA compensation plan should provide Legislative Council Staff with the applicable department exempt salary schedule for the current FY 2025-26. Salary survey increases, performance-based pay awards, and tenure-based step increases along a paygrade are not included in fiscal note estimates and are assumed to be addressed through the annual budget process.

Prorating First-year Impacts

First-year revenue and expenditure impacts will be prorated to reflect a bill's effective date. As discussed above, a one-month hiring lag is also assumed for FTE required upon enactment of the bill, resulting in costs prorated as follows. As mentioned above, salary and benefit proration applies to all fund sources.

- **Petition clause.** For bills that take effect following a 90-day referendum period, FTE and related costs will be prorated to reflect 10 months (10/12ths) of the fiscal year based on an assumed September 1 start date.
- **July 1 effective date.** For bills that take effect on July 1, FTE and related costs will be prorated to reflect 11 months (11/12ths) of the fiscal year based on an assumed August 1 start date, which factors in hiring timelines.
- **Safety clause / effective upon becoming law. Bills** with a safety clause that take effect immediately upon becoming law are assumed to take effect June 1, unless additional information is known about when the bill is likely to be signed by the Governor and take effect. For bills with an assumed June 1 effective date, it is assumed that staff will be hired on July 1 and FTE and related costs will be incurred for the whole fiscal year. In most cases, any costs incurred in June of the current fiscal year are assumed to be absorbable.
- **Other dates.** Bills with other effective dates will be prorated in a similar manner, taking into account the specific effective date.

Temporary Labor

Temporary labor may be appropriate if legislation requires either temporary services or a seasonal program. Cost estimates for temporary positions will be based upon the equivalent entry-level wages of permanent state positions and should include state costs for PERA and Medicare contributions.



Hours per 1.0 FTE

The personal services cost estimate for 1.0 FTE will be based on 2,080 hours per year, except for functions in the Department of Law, which will be based on 1,800 billable hours per year.

Medicare

Medicare contributions for new state employees will be calculated at 1.45 percent of the employee's annual salary.

PERA Contributions

Employer contributions for PERA by state agencies are included as personal services costs, except that amortization equalization disbursements (AED) and supplemental amortization equalization disbursements (SAED) are excluded and listed as a centrally appropriated cost. Employer contributions to PERA by state agencies are based on a percentage of the employee's annual salary, as listed in Table 1. Additional information is available on the [PERA website](#).

Table 1
State Employer Contribution Rates to PERA

Personnel Category	FY 2025-26 and Future Years
State	11.63%
Safety Officers	14.33%
Judges	14.91%

Note: Employer contributions exclude the additional 10% contribution for AED/SAED, which are shown as centrally appropriated costs in fiscal notes. Contribution rates are subject to change under the automatic adjustment and the DC supplement provisions.

Operating and Capital Outlay Expenses

Standard Costs per FTE

Common policies require a minimum of 0.5 FTE to qualify for a prorated portion of annual operating and one-time capital outlay expenses, shown in the tables below. With justification and documentation, additional capital outlay costs may be included for based on the needs of the position. The number of employees requiring capital outlay expenses should be rounded up or down to the nearest whole FTE, based on the total number of FTE required.



Table 2A
Ongoing Operating Expenses per 1.0 FTE

Cost Component	Cost per 1.0 FTE	Notes
Supplies	\$500	Average cost for office supplies/incidentals. Prorate in first year based on number of months worked. Full amount continues in future years.
Telephone	\$450	Average cost for landline office phone or similar arrangement. Prorate in first year based on number of months worked. Full amount continues in future years. Alternate telephone arrangements (cell phones, VOIP, etc.) will be considered based on position requirements.
Software	\$330	Average cost for common software subscriptions. Prorate in first year based on number of months worked. Full amount continues in future years. Alternate or additional per FTE software may be considered based on position requirements and agency practices.
Supplies	\$500	Average cost for office supplies/incidentals. Prorate in first year based on number of months worked. Full amount continues in future years.
Standard Operating Total	\$1,280	Ongoing cost per FTE

Table 2B
One-time Capital Outlay Expenses per 1.0 FTE

Cost Component	Cost per 1.0 FTE	Notes
Computer	\$2,000	Costs are one-time and based on the average cost of a standard laptop, monitor, and docking station.
Cubicle/Workstation	\$5,000	Costs are one-time and based on standard office furniture and associated electrical and data cabling.
Capital Outlay Total	\$7,000	One-time cost per FTE



Travel Expenses

Reimbursement for state employees traveling in a personal vehicle while on official state business shall be calculated at 90 percent of the prevailing IRS mileage reimbursement rate, which is \$0.70 per mile as of January 1, 2025. When authorized as necessary for official state business, the reimbursement for four-wheel-drive vehicles shall be calculated at 95 percent of the prevailing IRS mileage reimbursement rate, and 40 cents per nautical mile for privately owned aircraft.² Mileage reimbursements are rounded to the nearest cent for each mile traveled.

As of January 1, 2025, the reimbursement rate is \$0.63 per mile for standard vehicles and \$0.67 per mile for four-wheel-drive vehicles. Changes to these rates will be posted on the [Office of the State Controller website](#).

For state fleet vehicles, costs to the agency using the vehicle will be estimated in fiscal notes. A corresponding reappropriation of funds to the Department of Personnel and Administration for fleet vehicle services will only be included for bills involving 10 or more fleet vehicles.

Centralized Administrative Expenses

For legislation requiring central services, human resources, fleet vehicles, and/or finance and procurement, departments are requested to coordinate with DPA to estimate the fiscal impact and to determine whether an appropriation is needed.

Information Technology (IT) Expenses

Where appropriate, departments should coordinate with the Governor's Office of Information Technology (OIT) to develop estimates for IT-related fiscal impacts prior to responding to a request from Legislative Council Staff. As the majority of IT expenses are addressed through statewide common policies or direct billings by the OIT, most fiscal notes will only show costs for telephone service, one-time computer and software purchases, and contract staff. If additional IT expenditures are determined to be required, these will be shown as requiring a direct appropriation to the impacted department, with funds reappropriated to the OIT. Any new FTE will be shown as a direct allocation to the OIT.

Unless otherwise specified in a department's current contract or proposal, the following rates in Table 3 will apply for contracted IT personnel. For future years, FY 2026-27 rates are assumed to apply, unless an updated rate schedule is provided by the OIT.

² Section 24-9-104, C.R.S.



Table 3
Contract IT Rates

IT Service	Current Year FY 2025-26	Budget Year FY 2026-27
Computer Programming (Established Systems)	\$133	\$137
Computer Programming (Emerging Systems)	\$208	\$215
Project Manager	\$141	\$146
Business Systems Analyst	\$121	\$125
Network Administrator	\$119	\$123
Tester	\$121	\$125

Legal Expenses

Fiscal notes estimate legal expenses for a variety of reasons – rulemaking, general counsel, administrative actions, appeals, as well as changes in potential legal liability or exposure directly resulting from a policy change in a bill. However, fiscal notes will generally not include legal expenses for challenges to the constitutionality of a measure, or legal challenges to executive agencies' implementation of a bill. Additional information on legal expenses is found below.

Legal Services

Where appropriate, agencies should coordinate with the Department of Law in developing cost estimates for legal services. Legal services rates for the Department of Law will be based upon a blended rate of \$138.47 per hour for the purchase of services by attorneys and paralegals, and on 1,800 billable hours per year. FTE calculations include an administrative staff component, which is included in the billable hourly rate. Legal expenditures will be shown as requiring a direct appropriation to the impacted department, with funds and FTE reappropriated to the Department of Law. Legal services should be expressed both in terms of hours and costs. Legal service impacts of less than 100 hours are considered as minimal and will not be included in the bill's appropriation.

Administrative Law Judges

Cost estimates for administrative law judge services provided by the Office of Administrative Courts should be coordinated with DPA. Estimates should take into account that DPA allocates each department's total annual administrative law judge appropriation based upon historical usage ratios.



Earnings

The investment earnings rate for funds held by the State Treasurer is assumed to be 2.2 percent per year. This rate may be updated based on market conditions or other information.

Centrally Appropriated Costs

Pursuant to a Joint Budget Committee policy, certain expenditures are not appropriated along with other items resulting from a change to a state program, but instead are addressed through the annual budget process and centrally appropriated in the Long Bill or supplemental appropriations bills. The rates identified below shall be used to estimate these expenses for any new FTE. A fiscal note response that uses different rates must include a description of why those rates differ from these common policies. The centrally appropriated items include:

- **group health, life, and dental insurance (HLD) for new employees:** \$14,500 per FTE, based on the average cost of HLD for current state employees;
- **short-term disability:** 0.07% of salaries for FY 2025-26 and future years;
- **amortization equalization disbursements (AED) and supplemental amortization equalization disbursements (SAED):** for all employees, 10.0% of salaries for FY 2024-25 and future years;
- **family and medical leave insurance (FAMLI) premium:** 0.45% of salaries in FY 2025-26 and all future years;
- **leased space:** \$6,810 per FTE per year (\$30 per square foot, 227 sq. feet per FTE based on state space standards); and
- **indirect costs:** estimated by department. If your agency uses indirect cost recoveries, a cost allocation plan, or similar mechanism, please specify any indirect rates or costs that are applicable to the affected programs or divisions under a bill.

Although not appropriated in the bill, these items will be included in calculating the cost or fee where appropriate. Indirect costs should not be used to cover the other expenditures listed above. Agencies should provide a description of any indirect rates or costs assessments and how they are calculated.

As a general rule, funding for the items noted above will not be identified in a fiscal note as requiring a separate appropriation unless the fiscal note identifies a need for at least 20 new FTE to implement the bill. If an agency is affected by multiple bills that increase staff by more than 20 FTE, Legislative Council Staff, in consultation with Joint Budget Committee Staff, may begin



indicating the need for these costs to be included in individual bills, rather as centrally appropriated costs. For any bills where these costs may be included, agencies should identify the estimated cost of each item and provide a justification for the estimate.

Continuing Programs Set to Repeal (Sunset Bills)

Bills that continue a program that is set to repeal will be assessed as having a fiscal impact once the program would have repealed and ceased operations under current law. The fiscal note will show the change from current law, even if there is no change from current practice. For regulatory agencies and functions, state law allows agencies to be appropriated funds to complete the affairs of an expiring program for 12 months following the repeal date, for the purposes of winding up affairs. For these programs, the fiscal impact will be shown as beginning one year after the repeal date. For advisory councils, statute requires a sunset review, but does not allow for a wind-up period in the budget; therefore, the impact will be shown in the year immediately following the repeal date.³

Fiscal notes will show no need for additional appropriations where a program's authorization has not yet expired, ongoing funding has been included in the Long Bill or an agency's base budget request, and the bill makes no changes to the program's requirements. In these instances, the fiscal note will identify the program's ongoing costs and staffing for informational purposes only.

³ Sections 24-34-104 (5)(b) and 2-3-1203, C.R.S.