



# MONTANA LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

## Legislative Fiscal Division

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**Director**  
AMY CARLSON

DATE: January 4, 2022  
TO: Sec. D IBC members  
FROM: Cathy Duncan  
RE: Budget Change (Modification) Limitations in Agencies

During the December meeting of the Sec. D IBC, a question was asked about whether there was a limit on the amount of changes, referenced in the quarterly reports as modifications, an agency could make to the appropriations provided by the legislature. The following statutes, 17-7-138 and 17-7-139, provide limitations on the amount of changes that agencies are allowed to make. In short, agencies are limited to \$1.0 million or 25% of a budget category and the change is greater than \$75,000.

Budget changes are approved by the Office of Budget and Program Planning (OBPP), with each change being requested in a budget change document (BCD). If changes exceed the limit (are triggering), OBPP will send the triggering BCD to staff in the fiscal division for any related input or concerns. In the determination of triggering BCD's, OBPP tracks all changes by program and first level (personal services, operating expenses, equipment and intangible assets, and so forth) expenditure category.

**17-7-138. Operating budget.** (1) (a) Expenditures by a state agency must be made in substantial compliance with the budget approved by the legislature. Substantial compliance may be determined by conformity to the conditions contained in the general appropriations act and to legislative intent as established in the narrative accompanying the general appropriations act. An explanation of any significant change in agency or program scope must be submitted on a regular basis to the interim committee that has program evaluation and monitoring functions for the agency pursuant to Title 5, chapter 5, part 2, [and to the appropriate interim budget committee in accordance with 5-12-501]. An explanation of any significant change in agency or program scope, objectives, activities, or expenditures must be submitted to the legislative fiscal analyst for review and comment by the legislative finance committee prior to any implementation of the change. A significant change may not conflict with a condition contained in the general appropriations act. If the approving authority certifies that a change is time-sensitive, the approving authority may approve the change prior to the next regularly scheduled meeting of the legislative finance committee. The approving authority shall submit all proposed time-sensitive changes to the legislative fiscal analyst prior to approval. If the legislative fiscal analyst determines that notification of the legislative finance committee is warranted, the legislative fiscal analyst shall immediately notify as many members as possible of the proposed change and communicate any concerns expressed to the approving authority. The approving authority shall present a report fully explaining the reasons for the action to the next meeting of the legislative finance committee. Except as provided in subsection (2), the expenditure of money appropriated in the general appropriations act is contingent upon approval of an operating budget by

August 1 of each fiscal year. An approved original operating budget must comply with state law and conditions contained in the general appropriations act.

(b) For the purposes of this subsection (1), an agency or program is considered to have a significant change in its scope, objectives, activities, or expenditures if:

- (i) the operating budget change exceeds \$1 million; or
- (ii) the operating budget change exceeds 25% of a budget category and the change is greater than \$75,000. If there have been other changes to the budget category in the current fiscal year, all the changes, including the change under consideration, must be used in determining the 25% and \$75,000 threshold.

**17-7-139. Program transfers.** (1) Unless prohibited by law or a condition contained in the general appropriations act, the approving authority may approve agency requests to transfer appropriations between programs within each fund type within each fiscal year. The legislature may restrict the use of funds appropriated for personal services to allow use only for the purpose of the appropriation. An explanation of any significant transfer must be submitted on a regular basis to the interim committee that has program evaluation and monitoring function for the agency pursuant to Title 5, chapter 5, part 2, [and to the appropriate interim budget committee in accordance with 5-12-501]. An explanation of any transfer that involves a significant change in agency or program scope, objectives, activities, or expenditures must be submitted to the legislative fiscal analyst for review and comment by the legislative finance committee prior to any implementation of the change. If the approving authority certifies that a request for a transfer representing a significant change in agency or program scope, objectives, activities, or expenditures is time-sensitive, the approving authority may approve the transfer prior to the next regularly scheduled meeting of the legislative finance committee. The approving authority shall submit all proposed time-sensitive changes to the legislative fiscal analyst prior to approval. If the legislative fiscal analyst determines that notification of the legislative finance committee is warranted, the legislative fiscal analyst shall immediately notify as many members as possible of the proposed change and communicate any concerns expressed to the approving authority. The approving authority shall present a report fully explaining the reasons for the action to the next meeting of the legislative finance committee. All program transfers must be completed within the same fund from which the transfer originated. A request for a transfer accompanied by a justification explaining the reason for the transfer must be submitted by the requesting agency to the approving authority and the office of budget and program planning. Upon approval of the transfer in writing, the approving authority shall inform the legislative fiscal analyst of the approved transfer and the justification for the transfer. If money appropriated for a fiscal year is transferred to another fiscal year, the money may not be retransferred, except that money remaining from projected costs for spring fires estimated in the last quarter of the first year of a biennium may be retransferred.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), an agency or program is considered to have a significant change in its scope, objectives, activities, or expenditures if:

- (a) the budget transfer exceeds \$1 million; or
- (b) the budget transfer exceeds 25% of a program's total operating plan and the transfer is greater than \$75,000. If there have been other transfers to or from the program in the current fiscal year, all the transfers, including the transfer under consideration, must be used in determining the 25% and \$75,000 threshold.