



# Highway Patrol Airplane

Department of Public Safety

## Overview

Governor Rhoden's recommended budget includes \$5 million in one-time funding to replace the South Dakota Highway Patrol's current aircraft, purchased in 2007, which is no longer reliable or safe for public safety operations.

The aircraft plays a vital role in public safety across South Dakota. It has been instrumental in locating missing persons, tracking fleeing suspects, identifying impaired drivers, and supporting major events like the Sturgis Rally. With outdated technology and frequent mechanical failures, the aircraft is at risk of being permanently grounded. Replacing it will ensure continued aerial support for the growing demands of local law enforcement to keep South Dakotans safe.

## Background

The existing aircraft is now 21 years old and has been plagued by mechanical issues that have grounded it during key operations. Recent failures include an alternator, cylinder, and pitot/static malfunction during the Sturgis Rally and Operation: Prairie Thunder, as well as repeated camera system failures, including during the visit of a key dignitary. These problems are compounded by the fact that many parts are on backorder or no longer available, and some maintenance shops are unwilling to service the aircraft due to its age.

The camera system, purchased in 2013, is no longer supported by the manufacturer. The mapping software is unreliable and cannot be repaired. The radio system poses a safety risk, as the pilot must manually switch between air traffic and law enforcement channels, which is especially dangerous during high-stress or night operations. The aircraft's current configuration also requires low altitude flying to use the camera effectively, increasing risk during armed suspect situations as well as causing interference near our busiest airports in Sioux Falls and Rapid City.

## Funding

The one-time investment of \$5,000,000 in general funds includes a replacement aircraft upgraded with modern law enforcement equipment.