

**Vermont Enhanced 911 Board**  
**Barbara Neal, Executive Director**

**Presented to Senate Government Operations**  
**22 February 2023**

I'm here today to offer my thoughts on "what it would take" to move this work to the Enhanced 911 Board...

I should add that I've also spoken with both the Chair of the Board, Sheriff Marcoux, and the Vice-Chair, Steven Locke from South Burlington Fire Department but a discussion has not yet been had by the full Board.

Our thought is that we will wait for the expected draft bill language and then convene the Board for further discussion.

As I see it, expanding the authority of the Board to include the dispatch function would require several things:

**1. Continued Independence of the Board**

- a. It is critical, in my view, to preserve the highly effective model of an independent state board that we have operated under for over 25 years, doing so fosters relationship building and the development of effective partnerships across state/county/local emergency responders.
- b. Changes to the independent nature of the Board add a real potential for the introduction of problems that do not currently exist in the 911 program.

**2. Properly Resourced Board Staff**

- a. Including an immediate need for subject matter expert consultant for assessing technical inventory and gaps and for a statewide analysis of actual dispatch costs (which was discussed in committee discussion last week).
- b. Eventually these contracted technical experts would likely become permanent full-time employees of the Board.
- c. I would envision creating a parallel "Board staff" within our office to focus on the dispatch responsibilities...both the dispatch and 911 sides of the house would report to the Executive Director.
  - i. If I had to guess today, I would anticipate nearly doubling of needed staff.
  - ii. We are currently a team of 10 with one part time programmatic support staff member who we have requested be made permanent full time.
- d. Expansion of the Board's authority and responsibility will result in the need to interact and collaborate with 40 some odd existing dispatch agencies above and beyond the existing six Public Safety Answering points and will result in a significantly increased workload for the Executive Director which may necessitate the hiring of a deputy director and that will need to be addressed through appropriate compensation adjustments.

### 3. **Clear Authority and Control of Necessary Assets and Infrastructure**

- a. Governing authority should control the grant fund, currently at \$20M.
  - i. No grant funds should be distributed until a clearly articulated plan is developed and outcomes are defined.
    - 1. My understanding is that DPS has taken “a pause” on the distribution of funds now.
  - ii. DPS has been a partner with the 911 Board since the inception of the 911 program and I would expect that they would continue to play a vital role in the dispatch landscape.
  - iii. However, the planning and distribution of funds for regional dispatch centers cannot be driven exclusively by the need to lighten the workload at DPS, but rather by what is in the best interest of all stakeholders.
- b. Governing authority should have control of state owned or managed infrastructure and assets.

### 4. **Fee Structure**

- a. My understanding of your discussion on a fee structure for dispatching services, is (very simply put) that municipalities would pay the State/governing Board an established fee which would then be redistributed to dispatch centers based on population and call volume. I have many concerns about this approach. It is important to note:
  - i. First, according to our 911 data, DPS dispatches for 76 of the 443 response agencies contained in our database, including 33 of 135 EMS agencies (33%), 14 of the 241 fire departments (6%) and 20 or so of the 64 law enforcement agencies (31%)
  - ii. **I want to be clear that DPS also dispatches for agencies not contained in the 911 data such as fish and game, dmv enforcement teams, liquor control, some sheriff’s departments and/or constables...**
- b. This means DPS dispatches for about 17% of all non-state emergency response agencies, presumably at no cost.
- c. This could also suggest (though this would need to be formally evaluated)...that 83% of responders are getting their dispatching services elsewhere and may be perfectly happy with the service, cost and value to their constituents.
  - i. We should not fix what isn’t broken. Perhaps the issue lies with correcting the fee structure for the 17%, rather than disrupting it for the 83%.

### 5. **Board Membership...we feel the current Board representation is appropriate as is, Currently the public, municipalities, state/county/local law enforcement, fire service and EMS are represented on the Board.**

- a. We will have every intention of engaging with stakeholders regularly should this work come our way.