

March 5, 2023

Good morning Senator Hardy, Senator Watson, and other interested parties;

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee last Wednesday and to follow up with these written comments. I have a number of specific comments and suggested edits to the draft which I will list below, and I will also summarize the broader comments that I made on Wednesday.

My broader comments are the following:

- This bill as currently drafted appears to give the E-911 Board oversight responsibility for all things related to emergency communications; both 911 calling (which they already have), and emergency dispatching (which they currently do not have). That would include the dispatching functions currently being carried out by the Department of Public Safety/VT State Police at its two communications centers in Williston and Westminster, as well as other existing regional dispatch centers such as those in Shelburne, St Albans, Hartford, and Lamoille County. Numerous witnesses and even committee members have stated a desire to “not fix what isn’t broken” so I wonder if it was the committee’s intent to bring these existing entities under E-911 Board supervision.
- As you know and as we discussed on Wednesday, there are two huge pieces of the puzzle missing from the draft; funding and governance model(s). I think everyone has agreed that it is up to the Legislature to arrive at a funding model. Is it the intent of the draft bill that the E-911 Board will decide what are the appropriate governance models for the various regional communications centers?
- This draft does not directly address the issue that was the driving force behind getting us to where we have come over the past year, that being the need for DPS to shed its responsibility to dispatch for the many local first responder agencies that currently receive that service for free. Once we have successfully stood up the anticipated network of regional dispatch centers, many of those local first responder agencies will migrate to the new regional services on their own, but what about those who do not? Will DPS have the backing of the Legislature and the Administration to outright refuse to dispatch for local agencies when some of them refuse to leave?
- This bill makes reference only to emergency communications. A not-insignificant portion of the work performed by emergency responders (police, fire, and EMS) is on non-emergency type activities. However, even when these responders are engaged in non-emergency work, they still have a need for reliable communications with a dispatch center. In other words, dispatching is about more than just emergency calls. Instead of referring to an “Emergency Dispatch System” as the draft currently does, perhaps it should refer to a “Public Safety Dispatch System.”
- Lastly, with no disrespect intended to its members, I question whether the existing E-911 Board in its current composition is up to the task of managing this transition in addition to their current work

overseeing the E-911 system. I would recommend that the Legislature look at the current statutorily mandated make-up of the E-911 Board and evaluate whether the current Board membership is appropriate for the work being contemplated for them.

My specific comments on the draft bill are as follows:

- Page 1, line 19; "...comprises both an emergency ~~call~~ calling system and an ~~emergency~~ public safety dispatch system."
- Page 2, starting on line 14; "There are currently ~~more than 45~~ approximately 40 dispatch centers in the State, including two State-run ~~public safety answering points~~ communications centers, as well as six dispatch centers located in neighboring states, that provide dispatching services for hundreds of local, largely volunteer first responders in Vermont, such as fire, ~~ambulance, rescue~~ emergency medical, and law enforcement agencies."
- Page 2, line 19; "...ensure every ~~911~~ caller in their respective catchment areas..."
- Page 3, line 2; "...two regional ~~public safety answering points~~ communications centers operated by the Vermont State Police..."
- Page 5, starting on line 12; "'Dispatch Center' means a facility that provides ~~regional emergency dispatch~~ public safety communications services and may also be a public safety answering point."
- Page 7, line 15; "...answered at a predesignated public ~~service~~ safety answering point."

Thank you again for considering these comments and I look forward to visiting the Committee again next week.

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