



State of Vermont
Enhanced 911 Board
6 Baldwin St., 2nd Floor
Montpelier, VT 05633-7960
E911.info@vermont.gov

[phone] 802-828-4911
[fax] 802-828-4109
[TTY] 711
[800 VT] 800-342-4911

TO: House Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Barbara Neal, Executive Director

DATE: 2/14/2024

RE: h. 657

The 911 Board appreciates the opportunity to offer its perspective on the current language in h. 657, an act relating to the modernization of Vermont's communications taxes and fees.

The Board has always been concerned about the hierarchy of programs receiving disbursements from the Vermont Universal Service Fund (VUSF). That concern continues with this language.

- Placing 911 at or near the bottom of the disbursement list has proven to be problematic in the past and the Board is concerned that we will find ourselves in the same "shortfall" position in the years ahead; especially as costs for all the supported programs increase.
- As an example of the impacts of our position in the hierarchy, prior to FY21, the Board had historically set aside 300K per year for system replacement/upgrade planning, but has been unable to include that amount in budget requests for the past several fiscal years because of the VUSF revenue issues. The Board would hope to have that situation rectified with any restructure of the VUSF.

The 911 Board is also concerned about the continued "off the top" dedication of 17% of the VUSF funds to the Vermont Community Broadband Board (VCBB).

- To be clear, the 911 Board supports the good work of the VCBB and recognizes the importance of broadband expansion as well as the expansion of other technologies that improve access to 911.
- We note, however, that VCBB has had, and likely will continue to have, significant federal support for those initiatives.

Finally, in addition to the concerns about the 17% off the top diversion to VCBB, it is the Board's understanding that any funds remaining in the VUSF after the disbursements to the named programs would automatically be directed to the VCBB's Connectivity Fund.

- The Board's position is that some, or all, of the funds currently being directed to VCBB programs could be used to support the expected and necessary increases in the cost of 911 services and help support our ability to properly plan for the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment.