

Transition to Statewide Regional Emergency Communication Centers

House Appropriations

Maria Belliveau

March 7, 2022



Proposals Impacting PSAPs

This is an interesting year in that the General Assembly is being asked to consider two significant proposals affecting the PSAPs.

- Change funding source for E-911 Call Takers from Universal Service Fund to General Fund, an increase of \$4,468,213 GF. This proposal is in the budget for Enhanced 9-1-1 Board, Sec. B.235.
- The Department of Public Safety is recommending moving to a system of regional communications centers by adding five new regional centers to the current four regional centers, for a total of 9 regional centers. The two State run PSAPS in Williston and Westminster will continue to operate.



Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs)

The Department of Public Safety (DPS) currently operate two State run communication centers (PSAPs); one in Williston and one in Westminster. These two centers are supported through a combination of funds from DPS and E-9-1-1.

The Enhanced 9-1-1 Board supports four regional communication centers located in Hartford, Lamoille County, Shelburne, and St. Albans by supporting the costs of call taker seats. These centers are PSAPs and provide call taking and dispatch services to their respective catchment areas. The cost of dispatch is funded through contracts and agreements with participating towns.



State Operated PSAPs

The two State run PSAPs are currently staffed 24/7, 365 days a year providing emergency and nonemergency support to Vermont's citizens, visitors and first responders. The two PSAPS provide call taking and dispatching services for a number of State Agencies and in excess of 100 non-profit, municipal and county EMS, fire and local law enforcement agencies at no charge.

The proposal is to stop providing dispatch service to these 100 non-state agencies and have them contract for services with the existing four or the five new regional communication centers.

The existing two State run PSAPS will continue to operate and dispatch for state agencies.



Function of E-911 Call Takers

The call taking function involves taking the initial 9-1-1 call, obtaining the needed information to transfer the call to the appropriate dispatching center and providing the necessary medical and safety information needed while waiting for the responding emergency services to arrive. All 6 PSAPs work together to ensure that 9-1-1 calls are answered in a timely manner. If a call cannot be answered by a call taker in the primary area of the call origination it is automatically routed to one of the other call takers in the State. The 9-1-1 system provides address information with map location and a listing of the appropriate law, fire and EMS for the call location.

Call Taker positions are paid by the Enhanced 9-1-1 Board, currently funded with the Universal Service funds (Gov. FY '23 Request is to fund with GF). The FY 2022 budget has \$1,080,000 USF to support call takers at the 6 PSAPs.



Function of PSAPs Dispatchers

The dispatchers collect the necessary information to activate the appropriate response agencies. The responders are from many disciplines to include law enforcement agencies, fire departments, rescue squads, highway departments, power companies, wrecker services and emergency management organizations just to name a few. The communications take place in a variety of methods including by telephone, radio systems, email and computer aided systems that are cloud based and can be operated remotely. Calls for service are received from 911 call takers, direct telephone calls or text messages to the PSAP and from first responders requesting information and services.

Dispatcher positions are paid by the Department of Public Safety.



Justification for Expansion of Regional Centers

- The Department of Public Safety provides dispatch services for about 100 municipalities at no charge. Towns not served by DPS pay for their own dispatch services through the regional call centers or independantly.
- The Department of Public Safety has cited significant issues with staff attrition and recruitment. According to Human Resources, the VSP centers have the highest rate of turnover in state government.
- The two state run centers handle a disproportionate number of calls with significant complexity, and, coupled with the staffing shortage, are at risk for service interruptions.
- Staff must undergo extensive training to be proficient in handling the calls, making recruitment more difficult.



Funds Requested for Transition to 9 Regional Communication Centers

Source: VT Department of Public Safety

- The Governor's FY 2023 budget request includes a One-Time GF appropriation of \$8,000,000 in Sec. B.1100(a)(4)(A).
- The Governor's FY 2023 base budget requests includes an increase of \$3,000,000 GF in Sec. B.209.
- The Governor's FY 2023 budget request includes existing base funds to support the two PSAPs operated by the State, in addition to the new funds that are requested above.



Est. Budget For Buildout

Source: VT Department of Public Safety

- NEW Chittenden County: \$2,300,000
- NEW Essex/Orleans: \$100,000
- NEW Orange: No information provided
- NEW Rutland County: \$2,000,000
- NEW Washington Co: \$2,000,000
- EXISTING Shelburne: \$200,000
- EXISTING Hartford: \$700,000
- EXISTING Lamoille: \$700,000
- EXISTING St. Albans: \$200,000
- EXISTING Windham Co: \$1,250,000
- Transitioning Agencies first year costs: \$2,500,000
- TOTAL \$11,950,000 (Includes \$8M One-Time and \$3M Base, possibly some FEMA)



Est. Operating Budget

Source: VT Department of Public Safety

Note* These figures are just examples and do not reflect actual operating costs

- NEW Chittenden County: \$3,300,000
- NEW Essex/Orleans: No information provided
- NEW Orange: \$415,000
- NEW Rutland County: \$2,200,000
- NEW Washington Co: \$1,300,000
- EXISTING Shelburne: \$794,678
- EXISTING Hartford: \$1,094,503
- EXISTING Lamoille: \$866,872
- EXISTING St. Albans: \$1,000,000
- EXISTING Windham Co: \$1,100,000
- TOTAL \$12,071,053 *Note: Includes E-9-1-1 funds that support call takers



Questions ???

- Is there a budget plan for spending the requested \$11 million GF?
- What is the plan for funding the future operational costs of the Regional Communication Centers?
- Has the Enhanced 9-1-1 Board planned for the additional cost of call takers at the five new centers?
- Are local communities going to be asked to pick up the costs of the five new communication centers that are being proposed?
- If municipalities are going to be asked to pay for the five new communication centers, have the municipal boards and taxpayers approved of the proposal and any resulting expense?
- Will the Department of Public Safety be the lead on managing the emergency response system in Vermont through grant agreements with the regional centers?
- What is the responsibility of the State should additional equipment be needed, or infrastructure costs be incurred at the regional level?
- Will the regional communication centers be more successful recruiting staff than the state run PSAPs?
- Is this proposal the best approach to serving Vermont's emergency service needs?
- What metrics will be used to assess the service being provided to Vermonters by the regional communication centers?

