

## Barbara Neal Testimony Notes

### House Government Operations and Military Affairs

3/30/2023

1. Respond to/concur with Paul White's summary as to the activity, challenges, and conclusions of the Regional Dispatch Working Group, including:
  - a. Inadequate time and resources to respond to the requirements set forth by the legislature
    - i. Insufficient expertise on the working group to develop an appropriate funding model that would be equitable for all – though various funding mechanisms that are currently in place was examined
    - ii. Development of an estimated timeline and transition was hampered by lack of clear mission ... what does the end product look like?
  - b. Agree that an inferred objective for the working group was to identify possible means by which "DPS can be relieved of its responsibility to provide dispatching services to local public safety agencies throughout the State".
    - i. My opinion is 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 must be driven by what is in the best interest of all stakeholders and the totality of circumstances
    - ii. The Department of Public Safety has played a vital role in the world of Vermont emergency communications for decades and I am hopeful they will continue to play a significant role in the dispatch landscape moving forward.
2. Supportive of the general recommendations in the report for this discussion moving forward, namely:
  - a. Ensuring that all users of the system have representation and a "seat at the table" to ensure there needs are identified.
    - i. Fire/EMS, for example, have long been – at least in some cases – an after-thought or add-on to the needs of law enforcement who typically operate the dispatch centers.
  - b. There is a need for improved reliability, redundancy and resiliency in the dispatch system.
  - c. Some existing regional dispatch centers are working well and providing their constituents with excellent service. Don't fix what isn't broken.
    - i. There are multiple functioning funding models already in place, as described in the report.
  - d. As already exists in the statewide 911 system, standardized technical and operational requirements could help ensure all users are receiving a consistent level of service no matter where their call is processed.

3. Regarding s. 139 if discussed

#### **Funding Model:**

- a. The funding model is not clear and the impacts on existing, well functioning dispatch centers and the communities they serve is unknown at this point.
- b. **Board's Position at March 13, 2023 Special Meeting:** Following review of an earlier draft of the bill that eventually became s. 139, the 911 Board recommended that before there is a final determination of where in state government the "dispatch function" should be housed,

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answers to the following questions (and potentially other questions) should be determined. This analysis would likely require the use of SME's and funding for same would be necessary.

- regional dispatch center locations and staffing
- funding model impacts on existing centers and municipalities
- labor union impacts
- regional staffing availability
- governance recommendations
- recommendations for technical and operational standards
- current statewide inventory of dispatch related assets and infrastructure

**c. The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Public Safety, Executive Director and 911 Board Chair have engaged in productive discussions on this topic and are in agreement that:**

- We see the possibility of multiple paths forward on this issue. Key to this discussion is common understanding of "what problem we are trying to fix".
- Working together, in full and equal partnership, DPS/911 Board can keep moving forward toward the development of a clear operational plan with associated timeline.
  - This work will likely require the assistance of contracted subject matter experts to fill in gaps in knowledge and we recommend the use of some of the existing grant funds for that purpose
- Expect that we would be ready to present the results of this work to the GA in January.
- In agreement that as this work moves forward, it is critical that all stakeholders are represented and have a voice at the table.
- The existing representative Board and its staff can bring expertise on multiple aspects of the discussion and can work with DPS as a full and equal partner to support and expand the stakeholder engagement aspect of the work.