

Public Safety Communications Task Force – Legislative Charge
Secs. C.114 and C.115 of Act 78 (2023 Big Bill), as amended by
Act 87 (2024 BAA), Sec. 49 and Sec. 50

Sec. C.114 PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM;
DISPATCH; INVENTORY; DESIGN

(a) The General Assembly finds that protecting public safety and welfare is an essential function of State government and it is in the public interest to establish a statewide reliable, secure, and interoperable public safety communications system, comprising integrated 911 call-taking and regional dispatch systems, and to ensure that the system is equitably and sustainably financed and universally accessible by all persons throughout the State.

(b) It is not the intent of the General Assembly to establish a public safety communications system that disrupts or in any way jeopardizes the exceptional dispatch services currently in place or the existing 911 system, but rather to support, enhance, strengthen, and build upon those efforts and initiatives.

(c) The transition to a public safety communications system as specified in subsection (a) of this section shall be overseen and managed by the temporary Public Safety Communications Task Force established in subsection (d) of this section.

(d)(1) There is established a Public Safety Communications Task Force to oversee and manage all phases of the development, design, and implementation of a statewide public safety communications system as required by this section.

(2) The Task Force shall consist of seven members as follows:

- (A) the Executive Director of the Enhanced 911 Board, who shall serve as Co-Chair;
- (B) the Commissioner of Public Safety or designee, who shall serve as Co-Chair;
- (C) one municipal official appointed by the Executive Director of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns;
- (D) one representative from a public safety answering point overseen by a municipal police department appointed by the Vermont Association of Chiefs of Police;
- (E) one emergency medical technician or paramedic appointed by the Vermont State Ambulance Association;
- (F) one firefighter appointed by the Vermont State Firefighters' Association; and
- (G) the Chair of the Regional Dispatch Working Group established by the General Assembly in 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 185.

(3) At its initial organizational meeting the Task Force shall elect from among its members a vice chair. Meetings may be held at the call of a Co-Chair or at the request of two members. A majority of sitting members shall constitute a quorum, and action taken by the Task Force may be authorized by a majority of the members present and voting. Except for those members regularly employed by the State, members are entitled to a per diem in the amount of \$150 for each day spent in the performance of their duties. All members, including members otherwise regularly employed by the State, shall receive their actual and necessary expenses when away from home or office upon their official duties pursuant to this section. A vacancy shall be filled by the respective appointing authority. If the Chair of the Regional Dispatch Working Group declines to participate as a member of the Task Force, the Task Force shall appoint one member who shall have expertise relevant to the purposes of this section.

(4) The Task Force is authorized to retain a project manager and one or more additional consultants with relevant expertise in public safety communications technology, design, and financing to assist with the requirements of this section.

(5) The Department of Public Safety shall provide the Task Force with administrative services and support.

(6)(A) The Task Force, in consultation with the Secretary of Administration, shall develop procedures and best practices for State agency cooperation and coordination on matters of overlapping jurisdiction. The primary purpose of this subdivision is to ensure the Task Force has access to expertise and data related to its mission, including expertise within and data maintained by the Department of Public Service, the Agency of Digital Services, the Division of Emergency Preparedness, Response and Injury within the Department of Health, the Department of Taxes, the Agency of Transportation, the Enhanced 911 Board, and the Department of Public Safety.

(B) Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to waive any privilege or protection otherwise afforded information by law due solely to the fact that the information is shared with the Task Force pursuant to this subdivision.

(7) All meetings of the Task Force shall be open to the public and conducted in accordance with the Vermont Open Meeting Law. All records of the Task Force are subject to the Vermont Public Records Act.

(8) The Task Force shall cease to exist when a State entity authorized by legislative enactment to permanently oversee and manage the public safety communications system becomes operational.

(e) The establishment of a statewide public safety communications system shall occur in essentially three phases, which include data collection and analysis, design, and implementation. Certain aspects of each phase may occur simultaneously as deemed appropriate by the Task Force.

(1) Data collection and analysis. On or before September 15, 2024, the Task Force shall conduct a complete inventory and assessment of all aspects of dispatch service currently provided in Vermont and, to the extent possible, dispatch service currently provided outside Vermont for response agencies located in Vermont, which shall include:

(A) an inventory of all existing dispatch infrastructure and equipment, including facilities, hardware, software, applications, and land mobile radio systems, referring to and incorporating any existing relevant data collected by a State or municipal entity;

(B) the number of full-time and part-time personnel currently performing dispatch service, taking into account personnel who have other responsibilities in addition to providing dispatch service;

(C) the current total spending on dispatch service in Vermont that includes and itemizes for each municipality and dispatch center all federal, State, and municipal appropriations and fees, every contract for dispatch or first responder service, and projected budgets;

(D) identification of the communications dead zones in the State, meaning those areas that lack the infrastructure to support public safety land-mobile-radio communications or cellular voice and data service, or both, and taking into consideration all cell towers, including those that are part of the FirstNet statewide public safety radio access network; cellular mapping efforts conducted by the Department of Public Service; and any existing, relevant mapping data collected by a dispatch center or other entity;

(E) with the assistance of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, a needs assessment to determine where and to what extent there are gaps in dispatch service or significant challenges

to the delivery of dispatch service and to identify those municipalities that are likely to be most affected by either the curtailment of dispatch service from the two State-run public safety answering points or from a new financing mechanism for the continuation of such service;

(F) an assessment of the service provided by each dispatch center and identification of particular challenges or vulnerabilities, if any, including with regard to workforce, failover procedures, communications technology, costs, and governance; and

(G) collection and assessment of any other information the Task Force deems relevant.

(2) Design. On or before January 15, 2024, the Task Force shall develop findings and recommendations related to draft elements of a preliminary design for a public safety communications system, including identification of a proposed implementation timeline and any additional data and resources needed to develop a final design on or before December 15, 2024.

The final design shall include:

(A) technical and operational standards and protocols that ensure an interoperable and resilient system that incorporates computer-aided dispatch systems and land mobile radios;

(B) technology life-cycle standards to ensure system and database upgrades are timely, sufficiently financed, and properly managed;

(C) system and database security and cybersecurity standards;

(D) continuity of operations standards and best practices that encompass failover procedures and other system redundancies to ensure the continuous performance of mission-critical operations;

(E) workforce training standards and other staffing best practices that support the retention and well-being of dispatch personnel;

(F) a resource allocation plan that ensures dispatch service is available in all regions of the State, including the establishment of new dispatch centers or expanded capacity and capability of existing dispatch centers, if deemed appropriate by the Task Force;

(G) a process for annually reviewing the budgets of dispatch centers;

(H) a recommended governance model to ensure effective State and regional oversight, management, and continuous improvement of the system, including identification of staffing or operational needs to support such oversight and management of the system;

(I) cost estimates for implementing the system in Vermont, including operational and capital costs;

(J) options for sustainably and equitably structuring the financing of the public safety communications system, taking into consideration:

(i) existing budgets for regional and local dispatch;

(ii) the population, grand list, and call volume of each municipality;

(iii) existing and potential State funding streams;

(iv) available federal funding opportunities for public safety agencies and emergency communications systems, including equipment, network infrastructure, and services;

(v) financing models adopted in other jurisdictions for public safety communications systems; and

(vi) any other standards or procedures deemed necessary or appropriate by the Task Force.

(f)(1) If the Task Force determines that sufficient minimum technical and operational standards have been developed to warrant the funding of one or more pilot projects, the Task Force may submit for approval a pilot project plan to the Joint Fiscal Committee.

(2) Pilot projects eligible for funding under this subsection may include new regional dispatch centers or expanded capacity at existing regional dispatch centers, provided the Task Force determines the pilot demonstrates project readiness and is otherwise consistent with the standards and purposes of this section.

(3) In evaluating proposed pilot projects, the Task Force shall give a high priority to projects in geographical areas of the State that presently face significant challenges with respect to reliably providing dispatch service.

(4) The pilot project plan shall include a description of each proposed project, the resources needed, and an explanation of how the project will align with, inform, and further the development of a statewide public safety communications system and ensure transparency and accountability particularly with respect to the expenditure of State funds pursuant to this subsection.

(5) The Joint Fiscal Committee is authorized to approve up to \$4,500,000.00 in total for pilot projects authorized by this subsection.

(g) On or before January 15, 2024, the Task Force shall submit a progress report on the data collection and analysis required by subdivision (e)(1) of this section, the findings and recommendations required by subdivision (e)(2) of this section, and a description and status report of any pilot projects funded pursuant to subsection (f) of this section in a written report to the Senate Committees on Government Operations and on Finance and the House Committees on Government Operations and Military Affairs, on Ways and Means, and on Environment and Energy. On or before December 15, 2024, the Task Force shall submit to the same legislative committees a written report containing its final design plan as required by subdivision (e)(2) of this section.

Sec. C.115 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 185, Sec. B.1100 is amended to read:

Sec. B.1100 FISCAL YEAR 2023 ONE-TIME GENERAL FUND
APPROPRIATIONS

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(b) \$11,000,000 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Public Safety for regional dispatch funding. The funds are subject to the following conditions:

(1) Up to \$1,000,000 shall be available for the retention of technical experts to assist the Public Safety Communications Task Force with the analysis and planning required by 2023 Acts and Resolves No. 78, Sec. C.114 and to fund the administrative expenses incurred by the Public Safety Communications Task Force. If the Task Force determines that additional funding is necessary to achieve its purposes, it may submit a request to the Joint Fiscal Committee. The Joint Fiscal Committee is authorized to approve up to an additional \$1,000,000.

(2) Up to \$4,500,000 shall be available to provide funding for pilot projects pursuant to 2023 Acts and Resolves No. 78, Sec. C.114(f).

(3) Any remaining amounts not obligated pursuant to subdivisions (1) and (2) of this subsection shall remain unobligated and unexpended until approval to expend the funds is authorized by further enactment of the General Assembly.

(4) In order to extract the greatest value from the limited State and federal dollars currently available for public safety communications modernization, it is the intent of the General Assembly that all such funding is expended in an efficient and complementary manner. To that end, the Commissioner of Public Safety shall seek to draw and deploy the \$9,000,000 in Congressionally Directed Spending to support Vermont's transition to a modernized, regional

communications network in a manner that coordinates with and advances, to the greatest extent possible, the statewide public safety communications system developed by the Public Safety Communications Task Force. The Commissioner of Public Safety shall promptly inform the Public Safety Communications Task Force as the federal parameters for expending the funds become available and as the Commissioner develops and, if necessary, revises the plan to expend such funds. The Commissioner shall solicit recommendations from the Task Force regarding the plan, including any revisions to the plan, the implementation schedule, and specific expenditures. In addition, the Commissioner shall update the Joint Fiscal Committee on planned expenditures.

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