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COUNTY of LUZERNE

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

9-1-1 • EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY • SECURITY

March 24, 2010

Good Morning.

The recognition of the need to review and potentially update the current legislation is, in my opinion, critical to the continued success and necessary expansion of infrastructure and services offered by 9-1-1 to keep pace with the ever-expanding technologies available to the citizens of the Commonwealth. With the identified need to better understand alternate communications technologies such as VOIP, expanded cellular service that may include texting and the diminishing reliance upon traditional land-lines is an exercise in constant evolution to develop protocols and technical needs to address these changes.

Although the proposal to surcharge prepaid cell phones is a prudent decision, perhaps the surcharges currently imposed upon normal cellular service should be revisited as well. As cellular calls now exceed land line calls into the center and generate more incidents than was anticipated, the real possibility of increasing the cellular surcharge to parallel the land line surcharge seems practical. The increased revenues could then be applied to technology and training to overcome the loss of traditional data in terms of ANI/ALI and allow the next phase of cellular tracking and location to keep pace with the public's demands placed on the PSAP. The additional revenue never before available could potentially be used for physical upgrades to the operations centers.

Secondly, the placement of definitive authority at the PSAP level to establish concrete policies toward the standardization of dispatch protocols has long been an obstacle in developing comprehensive action plans for the dispatch of emergency services. In Luzerne County's seventy-six communities, the invoking of Commonwealth autonomy has hindered the development of expedient and appropriate dispatch throughout the spectrum of all emergency services. The insistence of each community's ability to not only name their first responders but dictate how they will be dispatched and under what circumstances has impaired our efforts to provide the very service we provide. I understand the "my town; my rules" mindset but often find myself debating the validity of individual communities demands. In addition, a provision toward inclusion of communities that fail to meet the Class III City exemption for transition to the PSAP was a marvelous concept but again fails to provide adequate authority to the PSAP to, if necessary, force the cut over in favor of a County system that meets all the requirements of applicable laws and regulations.

Thirdly, the need to expand "allowable expenses" to include specific physical improvements to existing facilities that are taxed due to age and inadequate space should be seriously considered. The reality of the inability of the County to provide these much needed funds is evident throughout the 9-1-1 community. Stagnant tax bases and the increasing call volumes are simply a balance sheet that cannot support the costs of expansion to meet the needs of the Center. Another area for exploration would be to expand the current allowable percentage for salaries and benefits. The increase in the salary and benefits allowable expenditure would allow for a greater level of discretion toward employee retention with a lessening dependence on severely limited county and/or municipal revenues.

We, as a 9-1-1 community are still young and growing. I ask that any consideration of these points weigh in on any decisions this committee makes toward legislative action in regards to Emergency Communications.

In closing, I thank you for your time and the opportunity to address this esteemed assembly.

Respectfully Submitted;

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