

Report Highlights

Pennsylvania's 911 Emergency Telephone System: Funding, Expenditures, and Future Challenges and Opportunities

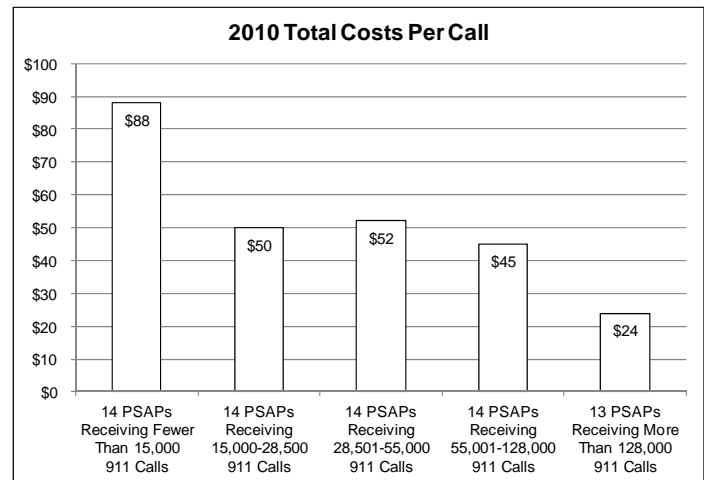
Act 118 calls on the LB&FC to study the funding and expenditures of the current statewide 911 system and issues that need to be considered as the Commonwealth transitions to "Next Generation 911."

We found:

- ***PA has relatively high 911 surcharge rates.*** PA's wireline surcharge is \$1-\$1.50 per month, depending on the class of county. Wireless and VoIP surcharges are \$1 per month. With a few exceptions, PA's surcharges are higher than the other states we reviewed. PA also ranks among the top states in surcharge revenues collected (\$197 million in 2011).
- ***We were unable to determine whether all the entities that should be submitting 911 fees are doing so and at the proper amount.*** We obtained several lists of telecommunications providers, but the lists varied greatly and none are authoritative. Providers also consider their access line information to be proprietary and do not share it with PEMA or the counties, making it impossible to verify that the amounts submitted are correct.
- ***Collections from the new surcharges applied to retail point-of-sale transactions have been far below expectations.*** We estimate new revenues for the first 12 months of the program will be approximately \$3.7 million, well below expectations.
- ***PSAP costs have been increasing rapidly.*** Total PSAP (Public Safety Answering Point) expenditures have increased by 27% since 2006, mostly due to rising personnel costs. The increases appear due, in part, to PSAPs being engaged in a host of duties not directly related to answering a 911 call.
- ***911 surcharges are sufficient to fund about 70% of PSAP expenditures.*** The difference, (\$80.2 million in 2011), is the approximate local contribution, which typically comes from county general funds.
- ***PEMA has little ability or authority to control county expenditures of either wireline or wireless funds, provided the funds are spent for eligible items.*** As a result, there is little consistency from county to county in either the type or amount of equipment purchased or

PSAP operational policies, such as staffing levels.

- ***Compared to most states, Pennsylvania already has a "consolidated" 911 system, but opportunities for savings exist through further consolidation.*** As shown below, larger PSAPs tend to have significantly lower costs per 911 call than smaller PSAPs.



- ***Next Generation 911 offers opportunities for streamlining.*** NG911 uses Internet protocols and networks to transmit text messages, pictures and video to PSAPs, which currently can receive only voice and teletype calls. The transition to NG911 will involve additional costs, but also provides opportunities to streamline and consolidate services.

Recommendations:

The report contains 16 recommendations, including:

- PEMA develop a formula for distributing wireless grants funds that would provide an incentive for PSAPs to control staffing and encourage PSAP consolidation.
- Telephony providers be required to register with PEMA and attest to their compliance with PA's 911 surcharge laws.
- The General Assembly amend Chapter 53 to be compatible with NG911 technologies and allow PEMA greater authority to direct the transition to NG911.