

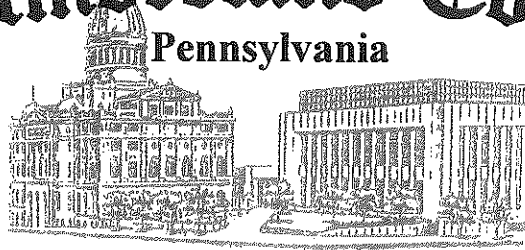
**R. Tyler Courtney**  
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Chairman

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Commissioner

# Westmoreland County

Pennsylvania



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To: Senate Veterans' Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Harrisburg, PA

Date: February 13, 2015

Re: Testimony by Roland "Bud" Mertz - Director  
Westmoreland County of Public Safety

February 18, 2015

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I have attached my written testimony for my appearance before the Veteran Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee on Wednesday, February 18, 2015 at 9:00 AM.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Chairman Vulakovich, Chairman Costa, Members of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify on the behalf of the Westmoreland County Department of Public Safety and our citizens.

Westmoreland County has the population of 363,233 residents that live within our 65 municipalities. Those residents are served by 135 fire companies, 21 emergency medical districts, 33 police departments, and one public safety answering point.

The Westmoreland County 911 Center is the full time public safety answering point that employs 62 telecommunicators, six supervisors, two quality assurance supervisors, one IT Specialist, one CAD Addressing Specialist, and one Radio Specialist, which is directly supervised by one operations chief. The total amount of emergency related calls received in our 911 center for the year-2014 was 412,572. Considering the population within the county it is necessary to average 12 Telecommunicators and one Supervisor on duty for each 12 hour shift.

Over the last year I have seen budget numbers analyzed through various committees and hearings based on the amount paid for operational costs to run a 911 center. However, the important fact that I have seen missing during those examinations is the critical projects that remain unfunded and not pursued due to budget restraints.

For example, the 2013 operating cost to run just the 911 center for our county was \$8,776,619. Of that amount \$3,034,296 (35%) came from the county's general fund and property tax, while \$5,626,892 (65%) was applied from the 911 wire and wireless funds. However, several critical projects needed to support the 911 center were scratched from our budget due to lack of funding. Please allow me to explain these projects

The Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) System is the heart and soul of the 911 system. This system integrates phone system, mapping and database that allows for the caller's information, location, and jurisdictional coverage to appear on a screen before a telecommunicator call-taker to properly process and dispatch the

call for assistance. Our current CAD system had its last software upgrade in 2008. This older software version prevents us from upgrading critical applications that support the dispatch process. Not only is the current CAD software out of date, the network and hardware that runs the CAD system is in an extremely fragile state. Please keep in mind that this system is operational 24 x 7 x 365. The current costs to upgrade this system is \$857,406 of which PEMA had allocated \$38,265 in FY 2013 to be applied for a CAD upgrade.

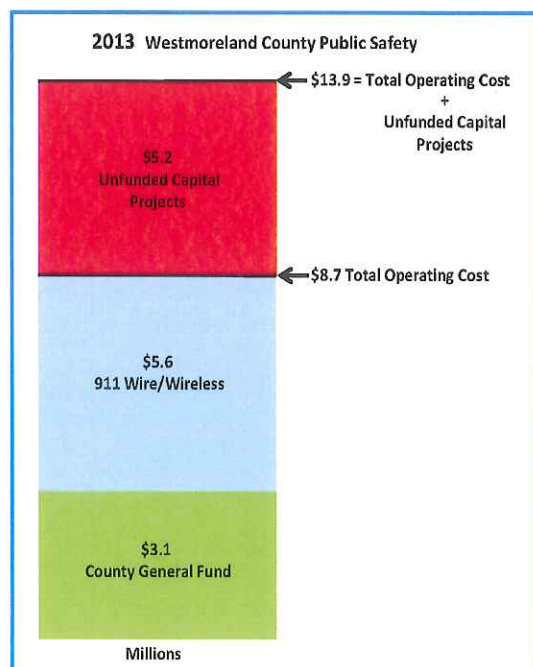
Our generator and uninterruptible power supply (UPS) systems are at the end of life, end of service. The cost to replace the generator and UPS is \$433,394 of which \$121,632 was allocated by PEMA in FY 2013. Both of these systems play an important role in providing an uninterrupted 911 service to our residents by ensuring our equipment will continue to operate during a power loss.

With the complexity of the multiple types of emergency calls for assistance that can be received in our 911 center the need for a standardized interrogation protocol for call-taking is essential. The Police Dispatch Protocols give the call-taker the ability to interrogate and obtain pertinent information in a timely manner from every caller. The protocols prompt the call-taker to find out exactly what is going on, if there was a weapons involved in the incident and what kind, description of the actor, means and direction the actor fled, and provide easy to follow step by step pre-arrival instructions to the caller or victim in life threatening situations. As well, the Fire Dispatch Protocols can recognize life-threatening situations through the interrogation of a caller quickly and determine the appropriate level of response. Just like the Police Dispatch Protocols, the call-taker can provide easy to follow step by step pre-arrival instruction to the caller or victim in life threatening situations based on the information received.

Currently our dispatchers use Emergency Medical Dispatch Pre-arrival instructions to save lives. Whether it be instructing a family member to preform CPR on a loved one or giving child birth instruction. Without the technological advancements with Pre-arrival instruction, the outcome in some of these cases would have resulted in a death. The total costs for police, fire, and EMS call taking protocols is \$450,000.

The Westmoreland County radio system went live in 2004. The 911 radio infrastructure provides services for the entire Westmoreland County Public Safety community and the 10,000 first responders that utilize the system on a daily basis. The radio system is currently in need of replacement due to technology and system failures. The radio system is in need of an \$11,200,000 capital commitment from the county general fund for upgrade and replace infrastructure. A large capital fund commitment takes away from other vital resources that are equally important to the operations of the 911 center. Capital projects like this would need to be spread out over three county fiscal operating years at \$3,730,000 per year.

As you can notice, these items are not luxury items that are nice to have, these are essential tools to sustain a 911 center. In 2013, if Westmoreland County would have pursued these projects the annual operating cost for the 911 center would have been \$13,986,619. With the 911 wire and wireless fund allocation of \$5,626,892 (40%) Westmoreland County would have committed \$8,359,727 (60%). This additional \$5,210,000 to the 2013 general fund would become a tremendous financial burden on the county taxpayers and would have affected other critical public safety and human service programs.



Technology has changed how the world communicates and has imposed a mandate on our 911 centers to grow with that change. I started my career in public safety dispatch in 1976 as a Police Dispatcher. My tools at that time consisted of a Radio, two phone lines, a pen and a typewriter. In the 26 years I continued to work as a dispatcher I witnessed the inception of many types of modern technologies beginning with personal computers with floppy disk drives to Automatic Number Identification (ANI) to Automatic Location Identification (ALI) to E911 with CAD and GIS mapping capabilities. Now as the Director for public safety I find myself driven to providing the capabilities for Text to 911 and Video to 911. Each and every advancement in technology provides a 911 center with better capabilities in the call taking and dispatch phases of public safety communications. I do not see a time where we can ever sit back and say we are finished.

It is proven that technology saves lives, Please allow me to give you a recent example. At 11:00 PM in January of this year, Westmoreland County 911 received a call from a wireless caller reporting that he had crashed on State Route 22 in Westmoreland County and was 5 miles east of Murrysville. The wireless caller told the dispatcher he was trapped upside down over a steep embankment. The dispatchers using wireless "Phase two" technology were able to use the latitude and longitude coordinates provided by the cell phone to locate the driver 10 miles east of the location he gave. The first responders reported that the way in which the victim went off the road left no indication that a crash had occurred along the highway. The victim was found over a 200 foot steep embankment with thick brush and numerous trees. First responders cut a path through the thick brush to locate and facilitate his rescue. Do to the cold temperature and the victim's extent of injuries, he would have died without the technology used to locate him.

As the Director of Public Safety for Westmoreland County, I have the responsibility to my commissioners as well as our tax payers to ensure our 911 center is capable to operating at full efficiency while remaining fiscally prudent that our expenditures are prioritized based on need. Those responsibilities carry

across all funds used to maintain our 911 center. Without proper funding these technological advances cannot be utilized by our telecommunicators.

I thank you for the hard work and effort this committee is putting forward with this situation.

Respectively submitted,



Roland "Bud" Mertz

Director

Westmoreland County

Department of Public Safety