

BETHLEHEM STAR LODGE, No. 20



P. O. Box 1387
Bethlehem, PA 18016
Phone (610) 861-7556 • Fax (610) 861-7646

May 4, 2015

The Honorable Randy Vulakovich
Pennsylvania Legislator

Transmitted via Facsimile: (717) 787-8625

Re: House Bill 911

Dear Senator Vulakovich,

The City of Bethlehem Police Department Emergency Communication Center opened in 1934. Since then, Bethlehem has maintained an Emergency Communication Center that has handled all the emergency calls in Bethlehem, for Police, Fire and EMS. Prior to the 911 system, Bethlehem had established a single emergency phone number making Bethlehem a forerunner in public safety issues. Bethlehem has continued to be a leader in providing fast, effective, and efficient 911 services including Enhanced 911, Wireless 911, Text to 911, and now Next Generation 911.

We certainly realize the need to be fiscally responsible with all public monies. To that end, Bethlehem again has taken a leadership role by participating in regional shared 911 services with other Public Safety Answering Points in our area. This sharing of services demonstrates an effort to enhance 911 services for our region, as well as reduce the overall cost of the 911 system.

I understand that House Bill 911 will be reviewed by the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee in the near future. I also understand that the legislation was approved by the House of Representatives without language allowing the cities of Bethlehem and Allentown to receive funding and retain control of their 911 Centers. The current language would allow the base counties (Lehigh and Northampton) to determine if the cities would continue to provide 911 services to their residents.

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Both Bethlehem and Allentown have long standing 911 systems that provide a necessary and vital service to the citizens and the public safety personnel within our jurisdictions. The services that both cities provide would be difficult to assimilate into a county system. This is especially true in Bethlehem which is divided into both Lehigh and Northampton Counties. This assimilation into the county system would jeopardize public safety by reducing the overall responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency of the services offered to our citizens. Reduced efficiency is never fiscally sound. Any effort to consolidate or regionalize these services should be evaluated and decided at a local level, not mandated by the Commonwealth.

I ask that you please put forth every effort to restore the necessary language to the proposed legislation that would allow the cities of Bethlehem and Allentown to retain control and receive funding to operate their 911 before the Bill leaves the committee.

Please feel free to contact me directly with any questions.

I thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

I thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

Jason S Fulmer
FOP Star Lodge #20 President
Bethlehem
484-239-4208

CC: Senator Patrick Browne
Senator Lisa Boscola