

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5335

As Reported by House Committee On:
Technology, Telecommunications & Energy

Title: An act relating to the authority of the statewide enhanced 911 program to support the statewide enhanced 911 system.

Brief Description: Revising the authority of the statewide enhanced 911 program to support the statewide enhanced 911 system.

Sponsors: By Senate Committee on Economic Development & Telecommunications (originally sponsored by Senators Snyder, Deccio, T. Sheldon, Morton, B. Sheldon, Hochstatter, Parlette, Sheahan, Hewitt, Haugen, Oke, McCaslin and Honeyford).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Technology, Telecommunications & Energy: 3/21/01, 3/30/01 [DP].

- Establishes priorities for use of state E911 excise tax revenue.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, TELECOMMUNICATIONS & ENERGY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 18 members: Representatives Crouse, Republican Co-Chair; Poulsen, Democratic Co-Chair; Casada, Republican Vice Chair; Ruderman, Democratic Vice Chair; Anderson, Berkey, Bush, B. Chandler, Cooper, DeBolt, Esser, Hunt, Linville, Mielke, Morris, Pflug, Simpson and Wood.

Staff: Pam Madson (786-7166).

Background:

Where a 911 system is available, a person can contact emergency assistance by dialing 911.— Under a basic 911 system, the caller must identify his or her location to the emergency system personnel. Under an enhanced 911 (E911) system, the caller's phone number and location are automatically displayed at the 911 call center.

Enhanced 911 services are funded by county and state excise taxes. All counties levy an

excise tax on each switched telephone access line. The maximum rate that a county may levy on a switched line is 50 cents. Counties may also impose an excise tax of up to 25 cents per month on each radio (wireless/cellular) access line for 911 purposes.

A state tax was authorized by voters in 1991, by adoption of Referendum 42. The referendum provided for a maximum monthly state tax of 20 cents per switched access line to develop an E911 system. The state tax was scheduled to lower to 10 cents after December 31, 1998. However, in 1998 the Legislature made the 20 cents maximum rate permanent. The actual tax rate is to be based on actual revenue needs and may vary from year to year. The state E911 coordinator, in the state military department, recommends a rate each year to the Utilities and Transportation Commission, which sets the rate for the following year.

State E911 tax revenue must be used only to help implement and operate E911 services statewide. The state E911 coordinator, with the advice of the E911 advisory committee, specifies by rule the purposes for which state tax revenue may be spent. State tax revenue may be used to pay for increased salary costs in a county with fewer than 75,000 residents, if the county's salary costs have increased as a result of handling 911 calls. This salary assistance is limited to a maximum of 3 years. A county may not receive any state E911 tax funds unless the county has imposed the maximum county 911 taxes. When two or more counties jointly operate a multi county E911 system, state assistance may be provided to the multi county region. If counties in the multi county region have fewer than 75,000 residents, then the state assistance may include salary assistance. There is no restriction on the number of years that salary assistance may be provided to a multi county region.

Summary of Bill:

Statutory directives for the expenditure of moneys from the state enhanced 911 account are modified. Moneys from the account must be used to support the statewide coordination and management of the enhanced 911 system and, within available funds, to help with operational costs of the system. Specific provisions permitting state enhanced 911 tax revenue to be spent for local salary assistance are eliminated. The E911 coordinator may enter into statewide agreements to improve 911 services for all counties.

The state E911 coordinator continues to be responsible for rules specifying the additional purposes for which remaining state tax revenue may be spent. The coordinator must consider the base needs of individual counties for specific assistance. Priorities for funding are: First, to assure that 911 dialing is operational statewide; second, to assist counties in achieving a basic service level for 911 operations; and third, to assist counties in acquiring capital items for increasing 911 effectiveness.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 2001.

Testimony For: This bill will make a tremendous difference in the ability to provide 911 services. The state coordinator and the advisory committee will have more flexibility to use the funds that are available and to use them more efficiently and effectively. It makes funds available to all counties statewide. It will allow continuation of adequate staffing and will bring the same level of service to all counties.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: (Pro) Steve Reinke, Kittitas County 9-1-1; Lorlee Mizell, Benton County Emergency Services; John Didion, Pacific County Sheriff's Office; and John Kaino, Pacific County State E911 Advisory Board.