

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5335

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Economic Development & Telecommunications, February 14, 2001

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: Senators Snyder, Deccio, T. Sheldon, Morton, B. Sheldon, Hochstatter, Parlette, Sheahan, Hewitt, Haugen, Oke, McCaslin and Honeyford.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Economic Development & Telecommunications: 1/29/01, 2/14/01 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5335 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators T. Sheldon, Chair; B. Sheldon, Vice Chair; Brown, Fairley, Finkbeiner, Haugen, McCaslin, Rossi and Stevens.

Staff: Andrea McNamara (786-7483)

Background: In 1991, voters adopted Referendum 42, requiring enhanced 911 (E-911) service to be available throughout the state by December 31, 1998. The Military Department is responsible for statewide coordination of E-911 programs. Under the E-911 system, a caller's phone number and location are automatically displayed at the public safety answering point.

E-911 services are funded by county and state excise taxes. The state levies a maximum tax of 20 cents per switched telephone access line. Voters approved this state tax when they adopted Referendum 42. There is no state tax on radio access (wireless/cellular) lines. State tax revenues fund statewide coordination of the E-911 program and help counties to pay for the extra costs incurred in upgrading from a basic 911 system to an E-911 system.

In 1998, the Legislature found that some counties generate insufficient revenues to cover E-911 related salaries and operational expenses and authorized state E-911 funds to provide temporary salary assistance to small counties or ongoing salary assistance to counties that have regionalized their operations. To qualify for state E-911 salary assistance, a county must impose the maximum allowable county excise tax rate.

The maximum tax 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. Thirty-eight counties impose the maximum rates.

Summary of Substitute Bill: Legislative findings are made, including that the Enhanced 911 (E-911) system has served to further the health, safety, and welfare of Washington citizens and saved lives; and that statewide operation and management will improve the system by creating efficiencies, permitting greater local control, and providing needed support to counties.

The purposes for which the state E-911 funds may be used are changed. The specific limitations on salary assistance are removed and replaced with general authority to the state E-911 coordinator to enter into statewide agreements to improve the efficiency of 911 services.

Direction is provided to the state E-911 coordinator for adopting rules that define the allowable purposes based on specified priorities. The priorities are listed as follows: (1) assuring that 911 is operational statewide; (2) assisting as necessary to assure counties can achieve a basic service level for 911 operations; and (3) assisting counties as practicable with capital investments necessary to increase 911 effectiveness.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute makes two clarifications: first, that moneys from the state E-911 account distributed to counties is provided within available funding; and second, that the new authority to enter into statewide contracts does not eliminate the existing prohibition against giving direct distributions to any county that does not impose the maximum county E-911 excise tax.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Current funding for salary assistance will disappear at the end of this year, and many of the smallest counties do not have the ability to pay for professional level services without assistance from the state fund. Many rural counties traditionally relied on unpaid volunteers to staff emergency response numbers, so these state funds will not be supplanting local funds.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Jon Kaino, Pacific County/WASC; John Didian, Pacific County/WASPC; Steve Reinke, Kittitas County 9-1-1.