

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5555

As Reported by House Committee On:
Community & Economic Development

Title: An act relating to public safety telecommunicators.

Brief Description: Concerning public safety telecommunicators.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on State Government & Elections (originally sponsored by Senators Van De Wege, Hunt, Mullet and Randall).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Community & Economic Development: 2/16/22, 2/18/22 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill
(As Amended By Committee)

- Establishes a Certification Board in the state's 911 Coordination Office to create a certification and training program for public safety telecommunicators.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Ryu, Chair; Paul, Vice Chair; Boehnke, Ranking Minority Member; Chase, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Donaghy, Frame, Jacobsen, Johnson, J., Kraft, Rule, Sutherland and Taylor.

Staff: Emily Poole (786-7106).

Background:

Emergency Management Act.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The state's Emergency Management Act establishes a comprehensive program of emergency management in the state, which is administered by the Military Department under the direction of the state's Adjutant General. As part of the emergency management program, the Adjutant General, through the state Enhanced 911 (E-911) Coordinator, must coordinate and facilitate implementation and operation of a statewide E-911 emergency communications network. Enhanced-911 is a service that automatically displays the telephone number and physical location of a 911 caller.

E-911 Coordination Office.

The E-911 Coordinator is the head of the E-911 Coordination Office (Coordination Office), which is established in the Emergency Management Division of the Military Department.

Duties of the Coordination Office include:

- coordinating and facilitating the implementation and operation of E-911 emergency communications systems throughout the state;
- seeking advice and assistance from, and providing staff support for, the E-911 Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee);
- recommending to the Utilities and Transportation Commission the level of the state E-911 excise tax for the following year;
- specifying rules defining the purposes for which available state E-911 funding may be expended; and
- providing an annual update to the Advisory Committee on how much money each county has spent on efforts to modernize their existing E-911 emergency communications system and E-911 operational costs.

E-911 Advisory Committee.

The Advisory Committee advises and assists the E-911 Coordinator in coordinating and facilitating the implementation and operation of E-911 throughout the state. The Advisory Committee members represent diverse geographical areas of the state and include a variety of public safety professionals, state and local government officials, and telecommunications providers.

E-911 Account.

All receipts from the state E-911 excise taxes must be deposited into the E-911 Account (911 Account). Moneys in the account may only be used for certain purposes including: to support the statewide coordination and management of the E-911 system; for the implementation of wireless E-911 statewide; for the modernization of E-911 emergency communications systems statewide; and to help supplement, within available funds, the operational costs of the system.

Public Safety Answering Points.

Washington has Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) that cover all counties within the state. Each primary PSAP is connected to the statewide network, which delivers location information of the 911 caller as well as other data needed. The Coordination Office, in collaboration with the Advisory Committee, offers training to public safety

telecommunicators working in PSAPs through the 911 Telecommunicator Training Program.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The E-911 Coordination Office is renamed the 911 Coordination Office (Coordination Office). References to E-911 are revised to refer to 911 in the context of the duties of the 911 Coordination Office.

A Certification Board (Board) is established in the Coordination Office to create a certification and training program for public safety telecommunicators throughout the state.

The duties of the Board include:

- adopting bylaws;
- adopting rules, with the advice and assistance of the 911 Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee), including rules to implement a state-approved training program;
- reviewing and approving state-approved training programs biennially;
- setting all public safety telecommunicator certification, registration, and renewal fees, and collecting and depositing all fees in the 911 Account; and
- establishing recertification requirements.

The Board must represent diverse stakeholders of the 911 system. The Board must consist of the following volunteer members:

- the chair or vice chair of the Advisory Committee;
- two Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) directors or 911 coordinators;
- two public safety telecommunicators from a PSAP;
- two labor union representatives from labor unions representing public safety telecommunicators;
- one representative appointed by the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs;
- one representative appointed by the Washington State Fire Chiefs Association; and
- one representative from the Washington State Association of Counties.

The Coordination Office is required to provide staff support and assistance to the Board including, but not limited to:

- establishing necessary forms and procedures;
- issuing a public safety telecommunicator registration and certification to any applicant who has met certain requirements; and
- maintaining official records for the state Military Department of all applicants and persons with registrations and certificates for public safety telecommunicator certification.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

The amended bill removes the term "enhanced" where it describes 911 calls and systems, the 911 Coordination Office, the 911 Coordinator, the 911 Advisory Committee, the 911 Account, the 911 excise tax, and state 911 funding and operational costs.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill creates standardized training and a certification process for 911 dispatchers in the state. All dispatchers should have the same minimum training requirements, so 911 centers know what they are getting when they hire dispatchers. This bill will help the state identify dispatchers and help support them. Public safety telecommunicators are the only public safety professionals in the state not required to be certified and not receiving standardized training. Training is very important to ensure that all calls are handled consistently throughout the state. Public safety telecommunicators get training and support, but it is not always the same across the state. Training standards should not be patchwork. Other states have minimum standards or certification requirements in place. Public safety response is continually evolving, with new technologies, police reforms, and other changes such as the 988 system. California has a certification program in place, and compliance was easily managed. Local agencies that have internal training can certify their training programs and continue to use those. This bill is important to the 911 community. This bill would bring long overdue recognition to public safety professionals that work diligently while facing trauma. The work only begins with passage of this bill; the Certification Board's duties will impact how the 911 system develops. The Certification Board would be comprised of knowledgeable representatives. Public safety telecommunicators should not be thought of as clerical workers. Public safety telecommunicators face stress, lack of sleep, trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout. The lives of firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical technicians rely on the skills and competence of public safety telecommunicators. The public safety system is only as strong as the weakest link. Public safety telecommunicators are a vital link in the public safety system. There is a shortage of dispatchers, and training and professionalism will help bring more applicants who want to be a part of a professional career that is given value by their communities. This bill will help with recruitment and retention.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) The 911 system is a technically complex system in Washington. Even with improving technology, the most important factor impacting how 911 calls are handled is the skill of the public safety telecommunicators. In these instances, dispatchers are handling complex situations with minimal information, and they must rely on their training and professionalism. Dispatchers have to remain calm and multitask in very stressful situations. Dispatchers have to learn how to use continually upgrading systems, such as text 911. Consistent training is very important to public safety telecommunicators and to the system as a whole.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Senator Kevin Van De Wege, prime sponsor; Jason Fritz, Washington State Chapter Association of Public-Safety Communications and National Emergency Number Association; Lora Ueland, Valley Com 911; Deborah Grady, Southsound 911; Nick Curry, NORCOM 911 Telecommunicator; Grace Shuey, KITTCOM 911 Telecommunications; Steve Minnis, Skamania County Sheriff Telecommunicator; James Schrimpsheer, Washington Fraternal Order of Police; Gary Jenkins, Pullman Police Department & Whitcom 911 Regional Dispatch Center; and Richard Kirton, Washington E911 Advisory Committee.

(Other) Adam Wasserman, Washington Emergency Management Division.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.