



State of Washington

# **911 Cost Study**

## **Interim Summary Report to the Legislature**

Prepared pursuant to:

Section 145, Chapter 6, Laws of 2019, Regular Session  
(Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1109)

### **BACKGROUND**

The Military Department (MIL) and State E911 Coordination Office (SECO) were directed in Section 145, Chapter 6, Laws of 2019, Regular Session (Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1109) to prepare a report on the 911 system by October 1, 2020 that must include:

- (a) The actual cost per fiscal year for the state, including all political subdivisions, to operate and maintain the 911 system including, but not limited to, the ESInet, call handling equipment, personnel costs, facility costs, contractual costs, administrative costs, and legal fees.
- (b) The difference between the actual state and local costs and current state and local 911 funding.
- (c) Potential cost-savings and efficiencies through the consolidation of equipment, regionalization of services or merging of facilities, positive and negative impacts on the public, legal or contractual restrictions, and appropriate actions to alleviate these constraints.

The State Enhanced 911 Coordination Office (SECO), as part of the Military Department, was tasked with the development of this 911 Cost Study. They identified a project team, formulated specific tasks and workgroups, developed a data collection process and created a project timeline. As of January 2020, this work was well underway.

On January 21, 2020 the Washington State Department of Health confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in the U.S. in Snohomish County. The following day the State Emergency Operations Center fully activated to address the pending threat. The COVID 19 response and summer wildfire season has led to an historic level of activations, requiring emergency managers, to include 911 at the state and local level, to focus entirely on these ongoing response requirements, place this study in an “on hold” status and submit this interim report. A final report will be submitted upon study completion.

### **PROGRESS UPDATE**

The study with full report is anticipated to be complete for the 2021 legislative session in January. The delay in final report submission provides the opportunity for the 911 community to reassess the positions, roles and responsibilities of 911 with respect to pandemics, worldwide emergencies, national lockdown events, and the connection with different crisis stakeholders like emergency management and local health jurisdictions.

In addition, recent national events that caused civil unrest demonstrations in many urban cities provided the opportunity to also review 911 policies, procedures, and training with respect to Telecommunicator (911 Call Taker and Dispatcher) roles and responsibilities; and how they relate to liability and contribute to ensuring appropriate responses.

### **PRELIMINARY FINDINGS**

The following are preliminary findings of the items called out in the proviso by section.

Section (a): Preliminary data shows the cost to operate and maintain the 911 system significantly exceeds the dedicated 911 excise tax revenue. These costs include the statewide Emergency Services IP Network (ESInet), personnel, facilities, administrative, and contractual costs as well as the equipment needed for the receipt, delivery, logging and recording of 911 calls by the Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs). It is important to note these costs do not include dispatch services, such as radio dispatch of field first responders that are outside the current Washington State definition of 911 but remain a critical piece of emergency response.

Section (b): The 911 excise tax covers less than 30 percent of the funding needed to operate PSAPs (local 911 call centers). Agency fees, sales tax, grants and other local funding such as property taxes are used to bridge the gap between the 911 excise tax and the actual costs of operating the 911 system to include the dispatching. These other funding mechanisms are often fragile, subject to the whims of the economy and competition from other local budget demands. Whereas the 911 excise tax has shown to be consistent and stable over time.

Section (c): Potential cost-savings and efficiencies have been identified in several areas including deployment of the ESInet II, development of pilot projects and subsequent deployments of equipment consolidation and regionalization efforts, use of cloud based systems, consolidated buying power for equipment and services, and cultivating strong partnerships and governance models.

The biggest challenge identified by county coordinators is insufficient and often inconsistent funding. Initial findings also show that, with regulatory changes, specifically updates and modifications to current RCWs, WACs and UTC rulings has the potential to increase efficiencies and realize cost savings. It is important to note that changes in the work environment caused by COVID-19 forced leaders to adjust work processes and explore non-traditional solutions such as working remotely and virtual communications, which may have potential cost implications.

## KEY INSIGHTS

- ✚ Washington State 911 continues to be a national leader in Next Generation 911. We are uniquely positioned to set standards for the adoption of future technologies and security, as well as sharing lessons learned in the development of modern technology advancements.
- ✚ The ability to meet the general public's expectations with respect to 911 and related technologies can be complicated and expensive. While some communities may have the ability to implement advanced technologies, there are still many areas that require significant and expensive infrastructure upgrades to fully utilize the new technology and work processes. Some of the infrastructure upgrades include telephony software updates to allow picture and video, as well as logging recorder updates to accommodate the increased bandwidth needed for these different data transmissions. Unfortunately, technologies are not yet developed to the extent the community believes and expects.
- ✚ In 2018, there were 6,931,101 calls to 911 processed by Public Safety Telecommunicators in Washington State. Initial findings show the single most important aspect of 911 success is the performance of the Telecommunicator. As the first of the first responders, the Telecommunicators gather critical information, de-escalate volatile situations and must remain calm and professional during every call. It is critical more efforts be placed on certification and training for these Telecommunicators.

- ✚ Washington State's current ESInet is one of the largest such deployments in the nation. It allows for advanced routing of 911 calls, virtualization of call handling, text to 911 deployment, and the ability to bring additional communications methodologies and data, such as video and telematics, into the 911 center.
- ✚ Modifications and changes are necessary to modernize current 911 RCW's and WACs. During the past four years, the 911 community has reviewed and drafted new legislative language to prepare Washington for the future. These changes were ready for introduction in the 2021 session but due to Covid-19, they are now postponed until a future legislative session.

## **CLOSING**

The 911 community in Washington State has one of the most proactive and cohesive governance models in the nation. For more than 25 years, the State 911 Advisory Committee, comprised of many stakeholders, has been committed to maintaining a strong 911 system serving all the people of Washington State. They are innovative in developing strategies to modernize systems, consider future funding sources, and be an industry leader in the nation. They continually identify cost saving measures and work toward program development that ensures they are able to take advantage of current and future technologies to better serve their communities.

The Washington State 911 team looks forward to sharing the full report in January 2021. They are prepared to tell their stories, show the true cost of 911, and identify where funding is needed. The report will inform the Legislature on where 911 begins and ends, where dispatch and monitoring of field units fits in the full process, and how funding sources create additional challenges to the complete cycle. It will identify recommendations that will ensure the stability of the current system and provide for future growth of 911 in Washington State. It will also seek support for the role of Telecommunicators as the first level of emergency response as they assess scene security for responder safety, provide safety options for callers, and provide medical aid and mental health services to the callers.

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