

Statement for the
House Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee
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Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency

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Chairman Barrar, Chairman Sainato, and Members of the Committee, I am Glenn Cannon, Director of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA). Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement and discuss the re-write of the Public Safety Emergency Telephone Act relating to 9-1-1 emergency calls.

I know the focus of this hearing is the draft legislation that primarily was the product of the Pennsylvania National Emergency Number Association (NENA) and the Pennsylvania Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) working with the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) and a number of the telecommunication carriers. Back on September 4th and 5th, we hosted a meeting at PEMA to discuss the 9-1-1 re-write and to work on the concepts that should be incorporated in the legislation. I thank NENA, APCO, CCAP, and the telecommunication carriers for the hard work they did on this draft bill. I see this draft bill as another important step in the process of getting the re-write done by the date the current law sunsets on June 30, 2014. Unfortunately, with PEMA receiving the draft right before Christmas, we have not had a chance to meet with the stakeholders to discuss it in depth. We plan to meet with them in the near future.

As you know, the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LBFC) issued a report in May 2012 entitled: "Pennsylvania's 9-1-1 Emergency Telephone System: Funding, Expenditures and Future Challenges and Opportunities for PEMA." The LBFC report rang the alarm bell that we urgently need to fix the current 9-1-1 system. The overarching problem this report brings to light is that the current levels of 9-1-1 operations are on an unsustainable path. Without a major sea change in how 9-1-1 programs are funded and operated, in the coming years public safety across the Commonwealth is likely to be compromised.

While we were waiting for the latest version of NENA/APCO draft, I tasked my staff with reviewing the LBFC report and determine how we could address in the re-write the issues raised in the LBFC report. The first thing that was readily apparent – the current law was written to build out the 9-1-1 system but is not well suited to maintain it or move forward with future technology such as Next Generation 9-1-1. Therefore, it seems to make sense to write an entirely new version of Pennsylvania's 9-1-1 law rather than try to amend the language in a vastly outdated law. One of the things we did was to look at other states that had made recent changes to their 9-1-1 laws to see if there were concepts that could be appropriate for Pennsylvania's 9-1-1 program. My staff presented options to me and we moved forward in working on language for a draft bill. Once we finalize the draft, we plan on meeting with CCAP, NENA, APCO, and a number of the telecommunication carriers to discuss not only the draft but the rationale behind the vision for a new law. I do want to stress that all the stakeholders are partners in 9-1-1. We need the final product to be one that has strong consensus of agreement, fixes the 9-1-1 funding issues that counties have experienced, and further enhances the safety of citizens across the entire Commonwealth.

Several of the key aspects that we think should be in the final draft include:

- A more active 9-1-1 Advisory Committee to ensure that stakeholders and the General Assembly play an active role in fashioning 9-1-1 policy decisions;
- Less administrative requirements for counties;
- A fee that is standard and assessed agnostically regarding telecommunication devices and communication services accessing 9-1-1; and
- A method of distributing the 9-1-1 fund that has statutory certainty for counties and flexibility to regionalize 9-1-1 systems and provide statewide interconnectivity for counties and regional 9-1-1 systems.

Funding for 9-1-1 comes from surcharges and fees that our citizens pay on their communication devices. Maximizing those surcharges and fees for the public safety of our citizens must be the primary focus of everyone involved in 9-1-1. PEMA's overarching goal in the re-write, and moving forward, is to ensure that funds are maximized so that help in an emergency remains only a phone call away for every Pennsylvanian.

When Governor Corbett offered me the job as PEMA Director, he made it clear that this Administration would make public safety for all the citizens of the Commonwealth a top priority. He has followed through on that commitment with such things as signing into law HB 583 that was sponsored by Chairman Barrar and co-sponsored by many Members of this Committee. The re-write of our 9-1-1 laws will be another important step in Governor Corbett's commitment to further enhance public safety.

On behalf of Governor Corbett and the more than twelve million Pennsylvanians we serve, I thank you Chairman Barrar, Chairman Sainato, and Members of this Committee for your continued support of PEMA and our partners in public safety across the state. I appreciate the opportunity to testify here today and I will try to answer any questions you might have.