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## **THE FINAL REPORT OF THE 9-1-1 SYSTEM MODERNIZATION SENATE STUDY COMMITTEE**

### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

**Senator Jeff Mullis – Chair**  
**District 53**

**Senator John Albers**  
**District 56**

**Senator Vincent Fort**  
**District 39**

**Senator Frank Ginn**  
**District 47**

**Senator Jack Murphy**  
**District 27**

## COMMITTEE FOCUS, CREATION, AND DUTIES

The 9-1-1 System Modernization Senate Study Committee was created pursuant to Senate Resolution 1203 and charged with undertaking a comprehensive review of this state's 9-1-1 funding provisions in order to study and identify any reforms necessary to provide adequate funding for maintaining effective and efficient 9-1-1 centers.

Senator Jeff Mullis of the 53<sup>rd</sup> was appointed as the Committee's Chair. Senator John Albers of the 56<sup>th</sup>, Senator Vincent Fort of the 39<sup>th</sup>, Senator Frank Ginn of 47<sup>th</sup>, and Senator Jack Murphy of the 27<sup>th</sup> also served on the Committee. The Committee met on October 28, 2014 and November 12, 2014 at the State Capitol.

The Committee heard testimony from Wayne Smith, Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA); Carolyn Flores, retired director of East Texas Council of Governments (ETCOG) 9-1-1 Services; Robert Highsmith and Angela Barrett, City of Atlanta; Michael Wall, Comcast; Michael McPherson, Georgia Municipal Association (GMA); David Mumford, Paulding County; Debbie Vance, Gordon County; Greg Whitaker, Douglas County; Kevin Curtain, AT&T; Sean Casey and Amy Oneacre, Georgia Department of Revenue (DOR); and Clint Mueller, Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG).

## BACKGROUND

9-1-1 is the emergency telephone number for reporting emergency circumstances and requesting assistance from first responders. In its simplest form, dialing "9-1-1" from any telephone will link the caller to an emergency dispatch center — generally referred to as a "PSAP" or Public Safety Answering Point — which can send emergency responders to the caller's location in an emergency.

According to GEMA, there are 161 approved PSAPs in Georgia, twenty-five of which are operated by municipalities while all others are county-operated or multi-jurisdictional. All but three of the city-operated PSAPs are located within Fulton County. There are currently five levels of 9-1-1 Service:

1. Basic 9-1-1 routes a 9-1-1 call to the appropriate 9-1-1 PSAP serving the jurisdiction associated with the caller's location.
2. Enhanced 9-1-1 (E9-1-1) routes a 9-1-1 call to the appropriate PSAP and provides the PSAP personnel with the caller's phone number and location. 9-1-1 calls from a landline typically display the address of the fixed location as the point of origin of the 9-1-1 call.
3. E9-1-1 Wireless Phase I routes a 9-1-1 call to the appropriate PSAP with the caller's location and provides the PSAP personnel with the caller's phone number and the location of the cell site or base station transmitting the call.
4. E9-1-1 Wireless Phase II routes a 9-1-1 call to the appropriate PSAP and provides the PSAP personnel with the caller's phone number and the caller's location (latitude and longitude) to within 50 to 300 meters, depending on the type of technology used.
5. Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) routes a 9-1-1 call to the appropriate PSAP and is based on Internet Protocol (IP) utilizing one or more emergency service IP networks (ESInets) that replicate traditional circuit-based features and provides additional capabilities, such as multimedia data, or the ability to receive 9-1-1 texts.

## COMMITTEE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Study Committee focused primarily on five issues:

1. Parity of fees across different devices;
2. Centralized collections and audits;
3. Emerging technologies;
4. Possibility of restoring the 9-1-1 Advisory Committee; and
5. Consolidation of PSAPs.

### Parity of Fees across Different Platforms

Currently, landlines, cell phones under contract, and prepaid cell phones are all assessed different fees for 9-1-1 service. Landlines are assessed a maximum monthly fee of \$1.50; cell phones under contract are assessed a \$1.00 monthly fee; and prepaid wireless phones are assessed a 75 cent fee “per retail transaction.”<sup>1</sup> All telephone services billed to federal, state, or local governments are exempt from the 9-1-1 charge.<sup>2</sup> The fees for landlines and wireless contracts are collected by the service provider on behalf of local governments as part of the normal billing process and remitted to the appropriate local government. Prepaid fees are collected by the seller from the consumer and remitted to the Georgia Department of Revenue (DOR). The fees are then distributed annually to all local governments operating a PSAP based on population.<sup>3</sup>

#### Recommendation:

In light of the lack of device-fee parity, the Study Committee recommends that a maximum cap on 9-1-1 fees should be imposed uniformly upon all devices. Whether that cap should be \$1.50 or lower requires more study.

### Centralized Collections and Audits

As mentioned above, the 9-1-1 fees for landlines and wireless contracts are remitted at the local level while prepaid wireless fees are remitted to DOR. Additionally, every local government has the authority to audit any service provider operating in their jurisdiction.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of these audits is to determine if the provider is remitting the correct amount of the fees to the appropriate jurisdiction. This can theoretically lead to a provider being audited 161 different times annually.

#### Recommendation:

The Study Committee feels that a system of centralized collection and auditing through a single state agency such as DOR would streamline auditing and the collection of fees, while reducing the administrative burdens currently imposed on the providers and local governments.

### Emerging Technologies

The 9-1-1 system has benefited greatly from advances in technology for nearly 40 years. NG9-1-1 will enhance the system and allow it to keep up with the ever-advancing communication technology used by the public. As explained briefly above, NG9-1-1 is an Internet Protocol (IP)-based system that allows digital information such as voice, photos, videos, and text messages to flow seamlessly from the “caller,” through the PSAP, and on to emergency responders. The technology is still in its infancy here in Georgia, but the Study Committee had a glimpse of it when David Mumford, the Director of Paulding County’s E9-1-1 Communications Center, discussed Paulding’s PSAP’s ability to receive 9-1-1 texts. Texting to 9-1-1 is primarily intended for people with hearing impairments or those who cannot call, such as during a home invasion or abduction.

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<sup>1</sup> O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134(a)(1)(A); O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134(a)(2)(A); and O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134.2(b)(1), respectively.

<sup>2</sup> O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134(a)(1)(B)

<sup>3</sup> O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134(j)(2)(A)

<sup>4</sup> O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134(d)(4) and O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134.2(h)

Paulding is one of seven counties in Georgia possessing the ability to receive 9-1-1 texts. While the technology to implement NG9-1-1 systems is available today, the transition involves much more than just new equipment. Implementation includes coordinating efforts to plan and deploy continually evolving hardware, software, standards, policies, protocols, and training.

Recommendation:

Although legislation is not required for PSAPs to adopt emerging technologies and establish NG9-1-1, the Study Committee believes that the General Assembly should avoid passing any legislation that may delay or discourage PSAPs from adopting emerging technologies.

**9-1-1 Advisory Committee**

The Georgia Emergency Telephone Number 9-1-1 Service Act of 1977 established a 15-member 9-1-1 Advisory Committee.<sup>5</sup> The Advisory Committee's powers and duties include:

- Making recommendations to the Department of Community Affairs regarding the recipients of assistance grants provided for under O.C.G.A. § 46-5-134.2;
- Studying and evaluating the state-wide provision of 9-1-1 service;
- Identifying any changes necessary to accomplish more effective and efficient 9-1-1 service across the state;
- Identifying any changes necessary in the assessment and collection of 9-1-1 fees;
- Making recommendations to GEMA as to training that should be provided to directors of PSAPs; and
- Providing an annual report which should include proposed legislation, if any, to the Governor and the General Assembly.<sup>6</sup>

Although the Advisory Committee still exists statutorily, it remains dormant with no members having been appointed in several years.

Recommendations:

The Study Committee believes that restoring the Advisory Committee could help accelerate the adoption of NG9-1-1 technology, provide guidance to PSAPs, and assist in accessing existing grants.

**Consolidation of PSAPs**

The Study Committee briefly discussed the possible consolidation of PSAPs after learning that there are 161 PSAPS being operated by cities, counties, and regionally throughout the state.<sup>7</sup> Committee members briefly discussed that consolidating some of the PSAPS could reduce costs, eliminate overlap and redundancy, and streamline operations.

Recommendation:

The Study Committee believes that the benefits and drawbacks to PSAP consolidation should be studied further, possibly by a reconstituted 9-1-1 Advisory Committee.

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<sup>5</sup> O.C.G.A. § 46-5-123

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> One speaker testified that there are actually 184 PSAPs, but this report relies on GEMA's 161 figure given during its October 28<sup>th</sup> testimony.

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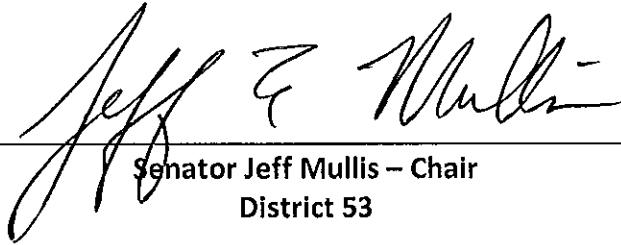
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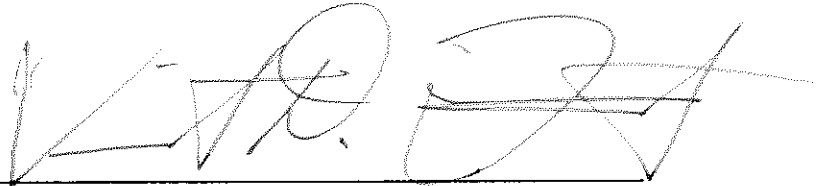


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