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Sponsor Testimony - House Bill 445
House Transportation & Public Safety Committee
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Chairman Baldrige, Vice-Chair McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy, and members of the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee. Thank you for affording us the opportunity to present sponsor testimony for House Bill 445. This legislation will fund and construct a statewide next-generation 9-1-1 system (NG9-1-1), fulfilling the statutory charge of the statewide emergency services internet protocol network steering committee (ESINet Steering Committee), created under House Bill 59 of the 130th General Assembly. The ESINet Steering Committee, a bipartisan, bicameral body which includes local government officials and the state's chief information officer, has been working on this endeavor for nearly eight years.

9-1-1 must keep pace with the evolving communications methods and habits of the public to remain reliable and relevant. The world of telephony has changed fundamentally in the past 50 years, leaving our nation's 9-1-1 infrastructure badly outdated. Today's 9-1-1 systems were originally designed for static, landline telephones with permanent street addresses and physical connections to carrier switches and networks. However, over the past decade we have almost completely transitioned to smartphones, meaning that fewer than one in five 9-1-1 calls come from landline phones. Enhanced 9-1-1 constitutes a partial evolution to a mobile-centric world, but 9-1-1 still lacks native support for smartphones and IP-based devices.

Under a state NG9-1-1, all Ohioans regardless of geography will have the following available services:

- Voice and integrated text-to-9-1-1, from traditional and new devices, with best location information available.
- Most accurate location available, including location data from the device and local jurisdiction GIS data.
- Calls easily transferred between jurisdictions, with increased collaboration improving emergency outcomes.
- 99.999% reliability with proactive monitoring for maintenance and security.
- Several options for disaster recovery with less reliance on pre-negotiated mutual aid agreements.
- Significant reduction in the chance that any 9-1-1 call in the State of Ohio will ever go unanswered.

HB 445 requires all counties to offer NG9-1-1 five years from the date a statewide NG9-1-1 Core Services System is ready and available to all counties. The proposed NG9-1-1 system would be funded by maintaining the existing 25-cent surcharge already assessed monthly on wireless service and extending it to include all devices/services capable of calling 9-1-1, including those involving landline and VOIP services. This will be known as the Statewide 9-1-1 Universal Access Fee (UAF). The UAF would stay at 25 cents for two years, and in years three through seven, the ESINet Steering Committee (which will now be renamed the Ohio 9-1-1 Steering Committee) would be enabled to adjust the fee annually as needed, up to a cap of 30 cents. In year eight, the fee would revert to 25 cents and the Ohio 9-1-1 Steering Committee would send a recommendation to the legislature on the effectiveness of the fee and what the fee amount should be adjusted to.

50% of the UAF revenues would go towards NG9-1-1 construction and projected vendor costs, 47% would bolster the existing 9-1-1 Government Assistance Fund and help communities with costs associated with upgrades necessary to hook into the NG9-1-1 system, 2% would continue to go towards the existing 9-1-1 Program Fund, and 1% would handle 9-1-1 fee administration by the Ohio Department of Taxation. Every effort is being made to explore the use of any available or proposed federal COVID-19 relief funds to offset the costs of this technology infrastructure partially or wholly.

This legislation also significantly modernizes numerous provisions of Chapter 128 of Ohio Revised Code, which governs 9-1-1 service throughout Ohio. One of the largest updates is a replacement of existing three-member County 9-1-1 Planning Committees (consisting of a county commissioner, municipal CEO and township trustee) with six-member County 9-1-1 Program Review Committees (county commissioner, county elected official, two township representatives and two municipal representatives). The legislation also allows for large metropolitan areas to have a different make-up.

These changes and all others in HB 445 have been vetted and approved by ESINet members, including representatives from the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, Ohio Municipal League and Ohio Township Association. Additionally, local control of 9-1-1 operations is maintained with this new legislation.

This overall effort is the culmination of countless meetings and deliberations over the course of nearly a decade, involving past and present legislators from both chambers and both parties. House Bill 445 not only implements a next-generation 9-1-1 system, but it will also ensure all Ohioans have reliable, accurate, equitable, and state-of-the-art access to emergency services regardless of location and when seconds count.

Thank you again for your consideration, and at this time we would be happy to answer any questions.