

Testimony H.B. 445

Columbiana County EMA Director

Peggy Clark

Chairman Baldrige, Vice Chairman McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy, and members of the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding HB 445. My name is Peggy Clark and I am the Emergency Management Agency Director in Columbiana County. I have worked in county level emergency management for the past 10 years. I have served Columbiana County for the past 7 years with part of my duties involving 911.

I realize that I am scheduled to testify in opposition to this bill, but I feel that I need to clarify that there are many aspects of the bill that I am in full support of. When you are answering a 9-1-1 call, you are likely speaking to someone that may be having the worst day of their life. I wholeheartedly agree that we want to have the best trained telecommunicator, using the most up to date technology to provide assistance to that caller. What I do not agree with is the continuation of unfunded mandates that add to the financial burden of local entities.

In 2012 the Ohio Legislature created the ESINet steering committee with the task to develop a statewide ESINet, which included a review of the current funding model used in Ohio, examination of the technology needed to support a move to NG 911 and recommendations on policies and procedures to govern the use of this ESINet. Unfortunately, there is not one person on the committee that serves as a local 911 coordinator or administrator. When dealing with funding, the focus of the group has remained on what it would take to fully fund the state's portion of NG911, with little consideration of the cost increases that would be passed to the local governments.

In 2016, the ESINet steering committee passed the PSAP Operating Standards which included minimum staffing levels, call recording requirements, call processing times and minimum training standards for anyone answering a 911 call. Counties were required to be in compliance with these standards by May 2018 or risk the loss of any current funding received from the Wireless Government Assistance Fund (WGAF). Although you have heard multiple testimonies concerning the importance of Emergency Medical Dispatching, this is not new and was part of the mandates from 2016.

To come into compliance with these mandates and meet the imposed deadline, it cost Columbiana County over \$120,000 in the first year. The state provided no additional financial assistance. We currently spend around \$40,000 annually to stay in compliance, and this cost will continue to rise as telecommunicator salaries increase.

Columbiana County currently receives \$210,416.76 annually from the WGAF. This amount has not increased since 2014, when the state reduced the wireless fee. I continue to question how it is possible that there has been no change in the number of cell phones since this time. A recent Pew Study indicated that 97% of adults now own a cellphone. If there has been an increase in cell phones, and the wireless providers are collecting these fees, where has that money gone?

Columbiana County expects it will cost approximately \$3,000,000 annually to continue to provide NG911 services to our residents. The WGAF covers around 7% of these costs, the rest is left up to local officials to come up with plans for funding. This is often accomplished with property tax levies or sales tax increases. Neither of these are popular choices for local government and either of these can fail with a repeal or nonrenewal vote. There needs to be an equitable, stable funding mechanism to assist the counties, with their "last mile" responsibilities for NG911.

Ohio ranks 48th out of 50 states for the amount of fees collected on cell phones, soon to be universal devices. Our neighbors maximum per line, per month collections are PA \$1.65, MI \$3.25, IN \$1.00, KY \$4.00 and WV \$6.40. That's an average of \$3.26 per line, per month. Consider what your current a monthly cell phone bill is. Would a few more dollars a month be a hardship? In a 2013 report to the ESINet steering committee, LR Kimball, the committee's consultant stated that "the state should revisit the current surcharge amount and consider bringing it in line with other states to enable increased funding for primary PSAP's to attain the service levels implemented by the state."

Several members of this committee have questioned what the cost of upgrading to NG911 will be to the counties. In 2015 Columbiana County signed a contract with a vendor to do just that. In anticipation of the state's ESINet project, we hired General Dynamics, which has since been purchased by Comtech. This is the same vendor that the state intends to use to build their portions of NG911. Columbiana County which, has a population of just over 100,000, spent \$850,000 for this upgrade. This was the cost six years ago so I would imagine that number would be substantially higher for counties that will be mandated to make this change in the future. It will soon be time for all of our equipment to be upgraded and we will again be facing another significant expense.

I urge this committee to consider the ongoing financial impacts on the local governments and not send this legislation forward without a significant increase in the universal device fee. I'm happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

Respectfully,

Peggy Clark, Director

Columbiana County EMA