

Testimony H.B. #445
Columbiana County Commissioner
Tim Weigle

Honorable Chairman Mr. Baldrige, Co-Chair Mr. McClain, Ranking Member Mr. Sheely, and all committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding H.B. #445.

I am Tim Weigle commissioner from Columbiana County located in the Northern tip of the Appalachian Region with a population of 101,000. I am serving my 31st year as a public official the last nine as commissioner

Allow me to give you a brief history of our past and current 911 system. In the early 1990's a few of the political subdivisions within the county operated their own in-house 911 system specific to the exchange area code they served. While these 911 centers served the purpose they were not without faults. As time went along into the early 2000's and state mandates came into play the board of Commissioners had to put together a plan to cover the entire county with a 911 answer system. Funding this new system was going to be a challenge for the county budget. After several tries at passing a levy placing a .50 fee on landlines it finally passed in 2005 and this appeared to be a stable funding income. The average yearly income for these landline fees from 2005 thru 2010 was \$276,000. In 2006 Columbiana County began to receive wireless income fees from cell phones and this again appeared to be another good funding stream for the future. Finally in 2008 an E-911 system was put into full operation in our county capable of address location and answering cell phone calls with some degree of identifying

location. The average annual county cell phone income between 2006 and 2013 was \$237,625.00

In 2013 when began my first term as Commissioner I accepted the E-911 committee assignment. As I learned more about the county E-911 it became clear to me that our aging call handling equipment was close to the end of its life. In 2014 the commissioners began a search for a new 911 call handling solution. Through the search General Dynamics was chosen to install a new NG-911 system that would be part of a pilot program with the State of Ohio. Today Columbiana County is hosted on a mini ESInet with Morgan, Carroll, Harrison, Monroe, and Noble Counties. This new NG-911 system has proven to be a very robust call answering solution with exceptional fail over and redundancies built in. The cost for the new NG-911 was approximately \$850,000.00 and took a year and half to fully implement and we are currently moving to bring in text to 911. Six years later our NG-911 call handling equipment will soon need a refresh and we expect this to cost at least a half million dollars. Another issue now facing our NG-911 system is a major consolidation push to go from five to one central PSAP location with a standby location for backup. Columbiana County has hired a consultant MCP (Mission Critical Partners) to do a feasibility study to determine what the project should look like. We feel consolidation would be more economical in the end but capital intensive on the front end. Today Columbiana County partners with four other political subdivisions whereby the county furnishes all the equipment, and the subdivision furnishes all the labor. While this arrangement has worked well for years it is becoming almost impossible for the subdivisions to keep EMD dispatchers for several reasons, funding being the biggest problem and mandated training. Before I finish my testimony, I want to revisit the funding the county receives from wireline and wireless. From 2011 through 2021 to date the wireline

county income generates an average \$163,590 annually. This is \$112,410 dollars less from to period 2005 to 2010. This is a clear message landlines are being cancelled because cell phones are taking their place. The wireless average income for the county from the same period 2011 to 2021 to date is \$213,336.00 annually. We feel certain cell phones are more in numbers in the county, but income has continued to decline. As you can see from the attached exhibit in 2020 landline income was only \$109.884.66 and expect this to continue to decline. In households today it is not uncommon for every member old enough to use a cell phone have one.

As we continue to explore the PSAP consolidation our in-house estimates will require approximately \$3.8 million to construct a consolidation call answering center and approximately \$2.8 annually to staff and operate. While I know there are mechanisms in place for a Board of Commissioners to pass legislation locally to generate revenue, no elected official wants to do this. I urge this committee to please reconsider the universal device fee and raise it to at least a \$1.50 per device with a 1.5% escalator annually and help the counties operate their 911 centers without fear of not having a reliable funding source. Even with this increase it likely won't be enough to support a statewide ESInet and county NG 911 centers. I do not think we are the only county faced with these same funding issues.

As I close, I thank the Transportation and Public service for their time today. I will answer any questions the committee may have for me.

Respectfully,

Columbiana County Commissioner

Tim Weigle