

Ohio Senate Financial Institutions and Technology Committee Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 50

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Chairman Wilson, Vice Chair Hackett, Ranking Member Smith and members of the Financial Institutions and Technology Committee – thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today in support of Senate Bill 50.

My name is Brandy Carney, and I serve as the Director of Public Safety and Justice Services for Cuyahoga County. For more than 17 years, I have worked in the field of public safety specializing in emergency management and 9-1-1 operations, particularly in urban and high-density suburban areas. I oversee Cuyahoga County's Emergency Communications System and lead efforts to build a robust infrastructure upon which public safety answering points across Cuyahoga County can rely. Throughout my career, I have seen the technological advances that have brought us to the brink of a true Next Generation (NG) 9-1-1 system, and I am excited that Senate Bill 50 would carry us through to our goal.

It is time for Ohio to migrate to an enhanced NG 9-1-1 system, which will result in more reliable connections and higher resiliency, ensuring faster services in times of emergency. When time is of the essence, this operational upgrade will save lives.

The NG 9-1-1 system envisioned in Senate Bill 50 will ensure Ohio moves to an ESINet system supporting digital communication and interoperability across jurisdictions. The National Emergency Number Association (NENA) has defined ESINets as the end state and best practice for networks that support public safety operations. Senate Bill 50 will help ensure Ohio is brought into best practice compliance.

This means Ohioans experiencing an emergency will know their call to 9-1-1 will be answered reliably and that all information will be transmitted digitally and at the fastest speed possible. Smaller communities with limited public safety answering positions will have peace of mind knowing that an NG 9-1-1 system can support them during emergencies that strain their capacity. And, for counties like Cuyahoga, where larger population bases lead to larger scale emergencies, public safety professionals can expect their neighboring jurisdictions will receive lifesaving information when mutual aid is required.

Given the importance of transitioning to the newest and best technology, fully funding an NG 9-1-1 system must be prioritized. Senate Bill 50 does this and provides the resources necessary for local governments to upgrade and sustain this most essential safety net.

Currently, the state collects 25 cents per mobile phone line under the statewide Wireless Fee. The revenue collected is passed along to counties to fund their 9-1-1 infrastructure. In Cuyahoga County, this amounts to approximately \$2.8 million each year. The funds are used to support Cuyahoga County's Emergency Communications Center (CECOMS), which answers 9-1-1 calls made from wireless phones. The current level of funding is simply not enough to support our CECOMS, while also planning for and executing system improvements that meet NG 9-1-1 requirements.

Under Senate Bill 50, the state's Wireless Fee is replaced by a universal access fee. Not only is the fee more equitably applied across all phone lines including voice over internet protocol (VOIP) phones, pre-paid mobile phones and landlines, but it increases the fee from 25 cents to 70 cents. This increase will be the true mechanism for improvement.

Beyond this increase, the percentage of the fees allocated to local governments will grow. Seventy-two percent of all money collected under the NG 9-1-1 Fee will go to the 9-1-1 Government Assistance Fund. This will at least double the revenue that comes to Cuyahoga County. Such an increase in funds will allow Cuyahoga County to continue to fund our CECOMS but will ensure we meet all NG 9-1-1 requirements.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 50. I urge the Senate Financial Institutions and Technology Committee to advance this important legislation.