

To: All Emergency Medical Service, Fire Departments, Law Enforcement Agencies  
VT Chiefs of Police  
VT Emergency Medical Services Advisory Committee  
VT EMS Chiefs  
VT Fire Chiefs  
VT League of Cities & Towns  
VT Sheriffs Association  
VT State Firefighters Association  
From: Commissioner Michael Schirling, Department of Public Safety  
Date: October 8, 2020  
Re: Dispatch Modernization Strategy - Synopsis

As most of you know, for many years there have been numerous efforts to update the methodology related to communications and fees for service.

The Department of Public Safety (DPS) runs two of at least six public safety answering points/multi-agency dispatch facilities statewide. DPS dispatches for over 100 public services agencies, accounting for approximately half of the our total PSAP call volume.

While existing state statute allows for billing related to dispatch services, no billing currently occurs. Historically there were many disparate fee structure in place. This current construct creates statewide disparity for a host of reasons including but not limited to:

- Many public safety agencies provide their own dispatching services while others partner together or obtain services through one of the four additional PSAP operations statewide. By all accounts, service levels at these PSAPs are excellent. While many agencies, and their respective taxpayers, pay for these services these same taxpayers subsidize the cost of the DPS-run PSAPs – creating notable financial disparity statewide.
- DPS is unable to take on additional agencies under the current construct, despite regular requests to do so as budget pressures prevent an expansion of services.

In 2017 significant work was done on this topic and preliminary reports were constructed outlining a fee structure. In January 2020, together with several modernization initiatives – most designed to bring parity to municipalities and reduce costs (see DPS Modernization Strategy available at the link below), we put forth a plan to

As we developed our strategy meetings and calls with stakeholders, publicized via email to all public safety agency heads, occurred on January 29, March 23, and April 20, 2020. Additionally, several email messages were distributed with drafts of plans and billing constructs.

The general overview of the billing construct is simple. It should be noted at this stage that this initiative is not related to an effort to find revenue or balance the DPS budget. It is simply to bring parity to a long standing area of disparity. Rather than create a complex formula and/or capture all of the costs of operations for the two DPS PSAPs, we determined the *cost only of dispatch staff* (no facilities, equipment, overhead, utilities, administration, or supervision – only direct service personnel) and crafted the following equation:

- Cost per call = total cost of dispatch staff / total calls for service
- Our plan called for phasing in billing over 5 years as follows:
  - No charge in FY21; 25% in FY22; 50% in FY23; 75% in FY24; 100% in FY25

Moreover, we recognize that there may be anomalies in the call volume that can throw an agency's cost off. On August 28, 2020 Captain Burnham sent a letter to all agency heads describing this and asking for your feedback to make adjustments to account for such anomalies.

As we continue final work to establish a fair and appropriate billing construct for dispatch services, the General Assembly has directed additional engagement. To that end, another meeting has been scheduled to discuss this and obtain feedback from each of you on **October 14, 2020 from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm via Microsoft Teams**. A link is embedded in the email that contained this letter and below.

[Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#) or [+1 802-828-7667,,906 960 754#](#)

Additionally, **three public comment forums (again via teleconference/Microsoft Teams) have been scheduled as follows:**

**October 19, 2020 at 5:00 pm** [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#) or [+1 802-828-7667,,436 819 308#](#)

**October 21, 2020 at 12:00 pm** [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#) or [+1 802-828-7667,,592 786 882#](#)

**October 22, 2020 at 9:00 am** [Join Microsoft Teams Meeting](#) or [+1 802-828-7667,,443 373 337#](#)

Links to each public forum as well as all relevant documents that relate to this initiative are posted at [dps.vermont.gov/dispatch](#).

We look forward to your thoughtful feedback in the coming weeks.

Stay safe and healthy,

Michael Schirling, Commissioner