

LEAB Dispatch Working Group  
Regional Dispatching

Bill S.273 tasked the Department of Public Safety and the VT Enhanced 911 Board with consulting with VLCT as “an equal partner in order to propose a plan that would result in a comprehensive, efficient, and equitably funded public safety dispatch system to dispatch law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical services statewide.”

The bill asked DPS to make the following recommendations:

- “(A) The manner in which different dispatch services should communicate with each other;
- (B) Whether there should be different dispatching services used among State agencies and departments;
- (C) The role of regional dispatch centers;
- (D) The funding source or sources for the proposed plan; and
- (E) The timeframe for implementing the proposed plan”

Though S.273 was ultimately vetoed by the Governor, the LEAB agreed to provide this information to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations. To that end, a small working group was identified and tasked with responding to the requested recommendations. The working group consisted of Gwynn Zakov, representing VLCT; Rick Gauthier, LEAB Chair; Gary Taylor, St. Albans Chief and Chair of the E911 Board; Tom Hanley, Middlebury Chief, representing the Chiefs’ Association, Seth DiSanto, Newport Chief, and VSP Captain Tom Hango, PSAP Commander.

Chief Hanley provided the group with an historical outline of DPS fee for dispatch. The most recent, in 2017, helped establish some parameters for the current working group, specifically, that responsibility for providing dispatch services and emergency communications is a local responsibility and that the affected regions are best suited to determine which options work best for them.

Discussion turned first to establishing a funding source. Chief Taylor advised that the Universal Service Fund, which finances E911, had been mentioned in the past as a potential source, but it upset everyone because it meant an increase in that tax. It was, however, the option that appeared to be most equitable; additionally, there would be potential for tax savings for communities currently supporting their own dispatch services.

An examination of USF percentages across the country determined that Vermont ranked 12<sup>th</sup> from the bottom with regards to tax percentage. The percentage could be raised slightly and, while resulting in a minimal increase in an individual’s tax, could generate significant funds to pay for regional dispatch centers. But whether or not the USF was the source of funding, the reality is that there needs to be some sort of sustained revenue for this project.

With regards to managing those funds, there already exists a successful model with how special investigative units were funded. Essentially, a board is created that accepts applications and disperses funds to regions. The working group agreed that there would have to be a period of at least three years of revenue collection before applications could be accepted, in order to build up the funds necessary for equipment and personnel.

The process would involve the following steps:

1. Affirm that dispatch is a local responsibility
2. Draft legislation that would provide a reliable source of revenue
3. Create funding oversight similar to the SIU model
4. Regions (as defined/determined by the end users) determine what dispatch model they use
5. Establish a build out period of at least three years
6. The state, via legislation, has to provide local agencies with a “drop dead” date after which DPS will no longer provide dispatch services.

This process had consensus among all group members.

The current Universal Services Fund tax of 2% generates approximately \$6.2 million annually, with \$4.7 million going to the 911 fund and the remainder going to broadband services. Even doubling the tax rate to 4% would mean only an increase of \$2-\$3 on an individual’s monthly bill.