

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5555

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As Reported by Senate Committee On:  
State Government & Elections, January 26, 2022

**Title:** An act relating to public safety telecommunicators.

**Brief Description:** Concerning public safety telecommunicators.

**Sponsors:** Senators Van De Wege, Hunt, Mullet and Randall.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** State Government & Elections: 1/21/22, 1/26/22 [DPS-WM, w/oRec].

**Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill**

- Establishes a Certification Board (Board) in the state Enhanced 911 Coordination Office (Office) to create a certification and training program for public safety telecommunicators throughout the state.
- Requires the Office to provide staff support and assistance to the Board.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5555 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Hunt, Chair; Kuderer, Vice Chair; Hasegawa.

**Minority Report:** That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Wilson, J., Ranking Member; Hawkins.

**Staff:** Melissa Van Gorkom (786-7491)

**Background:** People call 911 to get help in the event of an emergency requiring law

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enforcement, fire, or medical services. A 911 call is routed over dedicated networks to the appropriate 911 Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP). Enhanced 911 (E911) allows the caller's phone number and location to be automatically displayed at the PSAP.

Enhanced 911 Coordinating Office. The E911 Coordination Office (Office) is part of the Emergency Management Division of the Military Department. Duties of the office include:

- coordinating and facilitating the implementation and operation of E911 emergency communications systems throughout the state;
- seeking advice and assistance from, and providing staff support for, the E911 Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee);
- recommending to the Utilities and Transportation Commission the level of the state E-911 excise tax for the following year;
- considering base needs of individual counties for specific assistance;
- specifying rules defining the purposes for which available state E911 funding may be expended with the advice and assistance of the Advisory Committee; and
- providing an annual update to the Advisory Committee on how much money each county has spent on efforts to modernize their existing E911 emergency communications system and E911 operational costs.

Enhanced 911 Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee advises and assists the E911 Coordinator in coordinating and facilitating the implementation and operation of E911 throughout the state. The Advisory Committee members represent diverse geographical areas of the state and include a variety of public safety professionals, state and local government officials, and telecommunications providers.

**Summary of Bill (First Substitute):** Enhanced 911 Coordinating Office. A Certification Board (Board) of ten members is established in the Office to create a certification and training program for Public Safety Telecommunicators (Telecommunicators) throughout the state. The Office must provide staff support and assistance to the Board, including but not limited to:

- establishing forms and procedures;
- issuing telecommunicator registration and certifications; and
- maintaining official records for the state Military Department of all applicants and persons with registrations and certificates for telecommunicator certification.

Board Duties. The Board has authority to:

- adopt bylaws;
- adopt rules, with the advice and assistance of the Advisory Committee—rulemaking authority includes, but is not limited to, adopting rules to implement a state-approved training program for process, policy, and procedure;
- review and approve state-approved training programs biennially;
- set all telecommunicators certification, registration, and renewal fees, and collect and deposit all fees in the E911 Account; and
- establish recertification requirements.

Board Membership. The Board must represent diverse stakeholders of the 911 system. The Board membership consists of:

- the chair or vice chair of the Advisory Committee;
- two PSAP directors or 911 coordinators and two telecommunicators appointed by the Advisory Committee, one from the east side and one from the west side of the Cascade mountains for each;
- two labor union representatives from labor unions representing telecommunicators;
- one representative appointed by the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs;
- one representative appointed by the Washington State Fire Chiefs Association; and
- one representative from the Washington State Association of Counties.

**EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY STATE GOVERNMENT & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE (First Substitute):**

- Clarifies that public safety telecommunicator means a first responder working in a primary Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP).
- Removes the requirement that the PSAP directors or 911 coordinators appointed to the certification board be an Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials/National Emergency Number Association member.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 10, 2022.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill:** *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: Right now, nothing exists for certification so there is a variety of training and background throughout the state. Each agency does the best they can, but we can do better. This is important to the 911 community because it formalizes and standardizes minimum training requirements and certification for public safety telecommunicators. 911 calls should be consistent throughout the state. Thirty-one other states have minimum training standards. There are no preconceived notions regarding what the training will be which is why this board is necessary. Not all centers perform the same functions so that board needs the flexibility to address these differences. The board is balanced to ensure that there is representation from the workers, labor unions and police, fire and EMS in developing the requirements. Feedback was provided regarding requiring the two PSAP directors or 911 coordinators to be from an Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) or National Emergency Number Association member, we plan to remove that language. The bill also

inadvertently captures secondary PSAPs which was not the intent. Certified dispatchers will help certify rating and may reduce insurance costs. It also serves as an accountability tool to bring the profession to a level that the public expects no matter where they are in the state. This would also help with sharing telecommunicators between PSAPs across the state when necessary since they will have the same training.

After we define who dispatchers are we should work on getting them into Public Safety Employee Retirement System because they are an integral part of the emergency system and should be considered first responders. Telecommunicators are currently classified as clerical, but they are actually emergency responders because of what they deal with. They are a critical link to providing public safety to our communities. The police response begins when the telecommunicator answers the 911 call so why would they not have the same training and accountability. We rely on their skills and confidence when other lives are in their hands. They are not just taking a call but collecting information and analyzing data in a calm fashion while also communicating on the radio to responders. Difficult calls include suicidal calls, domestic violence, people who are taking their last breath, shootings and officers and firefighters in need of help. These traumatic events and the time and schedules necessary to do these jobs creates a lot of stress and post-traumatic stress disorder after these incidents is not uncommon. There is often no time to decompress after a phone call before you are onto the next call. This bill is being driven by the people in the 911 job. This will be long overdue recognition to these individuals who work so hard.

OTHER: 911 is a complex and technically advanced system to ensure people have seamless and reliable access to emergency services. The APCO is the main stakeholder that has pushed this legislation over the years. Teamsters believes that its members are first responders and support the training. The bill does incorporate many of the previous changes suggested but we have concerns that this bill does not establish telecommunicators as first responders. Also concerned regarding the cookie cutter approach to training when there are already training programs across the state. Some communications centers may have difficulty staffing depending on what the training may look like. We support establishing first responder status for telecommunicators, meaningful appropriate training, and are interested in retirement benefits and access to healthcare but this bill does not accomplish that.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Kevin Van De Wege, Prime Sponsor; Lora Ueland, ValleyCom 911—South King County; Katy Myers, Washington APCO-NENA; Keith Flewelling, Thurston 911 Communications (TCOMM911); Gary Jenkins, Pullman Police Department; George Long, KITTCOM; Nick Curry, NORCOM 911 Telecommunicator and Guild President; Grace Shuey, Kittcom 911 Telecommunications Supervisor; Steve Minnis, Skamania County Sheriff's Office Telecommunicator; Dave Heglin, Spokane Regional Emergency Communications Supervisor; Bill Hamilton, NORCOM 911; Bob Songer, Klickitat County Sheriff.

OTHER: Adam Wasserman, WA State 911 Coordinator, WA Emergency Management;

Michelle Woodrow, Teamsters 117; Erin Gauthier, Teamsters 117 member Redmond PD.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.