Indiana citizens expect to be able to dial 911 to quickly summon help from police, fire, ambulance, or other emergency services. To meet that expectation, emergency responders must be dispatched effectively and reliably. That is the function of Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) – or dispatch centers – operated by counties, cities, and towns.

In 2014, the Indiana Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (IACIR) reviewed the consolidation and funding of those dispatch centers. Two significant deadlines prompted the commission’s most recent review:

1) By December 31, 2014, previously separate dispatch centers within counties were required to consolidate to a maximum of two PSAPs per county (with a few exceptions) and
2) On July 1, 2015, the funding structure established in 2012 for distribution of fees collected statewide expires without a favorable recommendation by the Budget Committee.


Findings

Based on expert testimony and staff research, the commission established these findings.

Consolidation

- By December 31, 2014, all but Lake and Morgan counties met the deadline set by the General Assembly to consolidate 911 dispatch centers to no more than two per county.
- So far, no consolidations have occurred across county lines, but a few counties have collaborated on the purchase of internet phone (IP) systems.

Funding

- The current funding scheme for 911 dispatch centers, created by the General Assembly, took effect July 1, 2012, and will expire July 1, 2015, absent a favorable recommendation from the Budget Committee.
- A recent analysis of 911 dispatch centers in six counties (Hendricks, Howard, Montgomery, Tippecanoe, Wayne, and White) shows that 911 fees (collected statewide from telephone and cell phone users and allocated to counties) cover about 43 percent of 911 costs in those counties.
- Statewide, distributions of fees under the current state system have been flat.
- Counties fund the balance of 911 dispatch center costs with general revenues—including property taxes, county option income taxes—assigned to the county general fund; a cumulative capital development fund or another locally designed fund; and contributions from participating local governments.
- Counties face fiscal challenges in keeping up with technological advances for dispatch equipment and interoperable radios.

The overarching objective of our work on this issue has been to ensure a system of funding for 911 services that it is robust, stable, and equitable, and supports high quality local 911, E911, and related public safety dispatch services. The system also must support the implementation of new technologies, and increased efficiencies, both intra-county and inter-county, over time.
Recommendations

The commission recommends allowing increases in the statewide fees, giving local governments greater flexibility to raise their share of the costs of funding dispatch centers, and encouraging additional consolidations to maximize efficiencies. The commission’s eight specific recommendations are:

1. Encourage increased 911 system efficiencies through enhanced technologies and the adoption of best practices within and across counties.

2. Approach the Budget Committee to allow an appropriate increase on Statewide 911 Fees for landlines, contract mobile phones, and VOIP.

3. Treat 911 fees equally on all communications service as defined by IC 36-8-16.7-7, including prepaid wireless telecommunications service as defined in IC 36-8-16.6-7.

4. Provide additional local funding options to supplement current statewide 911 fees, including removing the link between having a public safety local option income tax and a local option income tax providing for property tax relief.

5. Enable local governments within counties to transfer levy capacity to county government to allow counties to fund 911, E911, and related public safety dispatch more fully and equitably with property taxes.

6. Establish authority for the Statewide 911 Board to audit telecommunications providers to ensure that all statewide 911 fees are being remitted.

7. Encourage the Statewide 911 Board to reset the minimum funding level for each county at the FY14 funding level. Establish that revenue received, in excess of the distribution amount and the network and administrative costs of the Statewide 911 Board, is distributed based on relative population. This method will direct additional revenue to counties with higher population which directly relates to additional call load.

8. Require the Statewide 911 Board to monitor 911-dispatch costs and funding by source and to report the results to the General Assembly every two years during each long (budget) session.

ABOUT THE INDIANA ADVISORY COMMISSION ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The Indiana Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (IACIR) was established by the General Assembly in 1995. The 24-member commission includes: state legislators, state administration officials, local government officials (county, township, city and town, and regional), and citizens. The IACIR’s mission is to create effective communication, cooperation, and partnerships between the federal, state, and local units of government to improve the delivery of services to the citizens of Indiana.

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