

## Pennsylvania's Outdated Law Impacts Funding for 911 Systems, Officials Say

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(TNS) — Commissioners and emergency officials in Pennsylvania are calling for reform for what they say is an outdated emergency telephone services law.

The law, enacted in 1990, doesn't sufficiently address cellphones and other wireless devices and is adversely affecting funding for 911 systems, they say.

"This is the top priority for the (County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania) this year," Somerset County Commissioner Pam Tokar-Ickes said.

Tokar-Ickes also is a directors board member of the statewide organization.

"Since 1990, there have been significant changes because of technology — a lot more people using wireless devices — and the legislation is a piecemeal collection."

The measure was formerly called the Public Safety Emergency Telephone Act and is now Chapter 53 of Title 35 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes.

A key component of the law, a wireless telephone surcharge, expired last summer but was extended for a year. It is set to expire this June.

Somerset County commissioners on Tuesday unanimously approved a resolution urging legislators to take action.

"We hope to see this legislation rewritten completely," Tokar-Ickes said.

As 911 system administrators struggle with the cost of offering emergency services, which officials say is exacerbated by the outdated law, county taxpayers must cover the difference, Tokar-Ickes said. Statewide, the current funding structure provided within the law covers an average of 70 percent of counties' costs to provide 911 services.

The rest of the cost is left to counties.

The law requires wireline subscribers to pay a \$1.50 surcharge monthly on their phone bills.

Wireless subscribers were added to the law as the number of users grew, but those people pay less: \$1 monthly.

That means dwindling funds for 911 systems, Dave Fox, Somerset County's 911 coordinator, said.

"A lot of people have dropped landlines altogether," he said.

"In a sense, we're losing that 50 cents. That adds up."

The law has been on officials' radar for a couple of years, Fox said, and officials hope that landline users and wireless phone and device subscribers would pay a uniform rate that would be increased to adjust for inflation.

"The 911 community and (commissioners association) have been working with legislators to propose this and try to get this done," Fox said. "We have been trying for the last couple years to get it changed and updated."

## Adding Up

Funds from the Public Safety Emergency Telephone Act for Somerset County's Emergency Management in 2014:

- From telephone surcharges: \$785,924
- Total expenses: \$1,073,170
- The difference that was covered by taxpayer money from Somerset County's general fund: \$287,246

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<http://www.govtech.com/public-safety/GT-Pennsylvanias-Outdated-Law-Impacts-Funding-for-911-Systems-Officials-Say.html>