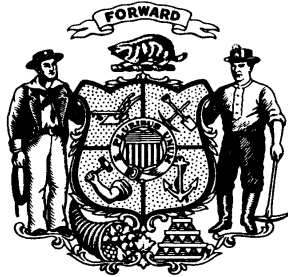


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January 22, 2013

Senator Alberta Darling, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Finance
Room 317 East
State Capitol

Representative John Nygren, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Finance
Room 309 East
State Capitol

Dear Senator Darling and Representative Nygren:

The Special Committee on 911 Communications was created by the Joint Legislative Council to study various aspects of 911 public safety communications in Wisconsin and develop legislation as needed to strengthen and improve the system. In particular, the Special Committee was directed to study existing funding sources and projected costs of the system, among other factors.

Membership of the committee included individuals with a wide range of backgrounds including local government, 911 center operations, telecommunications, health advocacy and health care, and law enforcement. The Special Committee held five meetings over six months at which it reviewed research provided by Special Committee staff and others, heard from a variety of invited speakers and experts, and debated the current status and future direction of the 911 system in this state.

A recurring theme during the Special Committee's work was the dissatisfaction of the Special Committee members with the current police and fire protection fee. This fee was originally proposed to specifically fund ongoing 911 services in Wisconsin. However, the revenue from this fee has not been used for this purpose. Instead, because of a state budget deficit, all revenue from this fee has been deposited into the state's general fund. The Special Committee supports the imposition of a uniform statewide 911 user fee on all communications users. However, the Special Committee does not support the continued imposition of a police and fire protection fee aimed at collecting general revenue for the state *and* a separate statewide 911 user fee.

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The Special Committee respectfully requests that you take action to eliminate the police and fire protection fee in favor of the Special Committee's recommendation to establish a uniform statewide 911 user fee on all communications users. Alternatively, the police and fire protection fee could be repurposed to support 911 service in Wisconsin, as originally intended. If this option is chosen, the current landline 911 user fee should also be eliminated. A more detailed account of the history of the police and fire protection fee is provided in the following paragraphs.

Beginning in 2007, a diverse group of interests concerned with 911 service and funding in Wisconsin got together to explore options to improve the 911 system. The culmination of their efforts was a comprehensive proposal to improve the state's 911 system by:

- Providing a method for 911 centers and service providers to recover their costs.
- Providing standards for 911 centers and telecommunications providers to meet.
- Coordinating 911 services statewide.
- Being technology-neutral with respect to the types of devices that can contact 911 centers.
- Allowing the 911 system to better meet the expectations of the public.
- Providing for better-trained 911 dispatchers.
- Allowing the 911 centers to have access to the latest technology.

These objectives were to be supported by the creation of a revenue source that was designed to relieve the state's property tax burden by having each communications "user" help to pay the costs of 911 service. This was to be done by creating a new fee capped at \$0.75 per line per month on all communications service connections. This proposal was included in the 2009-11 state budget as passed by the Legislature. However, because of the budget deficit that existed at that time, the proposal included a two-year delay in the implementation of the 911 proposal. During that two-year period of time, the revenue from the new \$0.75 fee was to be distributed to the general fund to partially offset the deficit. Then-Governor Doyle vetoed the 911 proposal, but retained the \$0.75 fee to produce revenue for the general fund, and made the fee permanent. This fee is known as the "police and fire protection fee." It continues to be levied against communications service customers, and the revenue from this fee continues to be distributed to the state's general fund.

The committee considered recommending legislation that would eliminate or repurpose the police and fire protection fee. However, we felt that it would be inappropriate for this committee, with its limited study scope, to recommend fiscal policy that would leave a gap in revenue sources for the state's general fund. To avoid this problem, the committee proposed that only the revenue generated from the police and fire protection fee that is in addition to the average amount generated over the last two fiscal years be used for 911 support. The committee also recommended the revision of other existing funding sources to form the primary fiscal support for its recommendations.

The committee feels strongly that the efforts of the people who crafted the vetoed 911 proposal described above were ignored, that people currently paying the police and fire protection fee on their monthly bills are being misled, and that the continued support of the general fund through this tax on telecommunications service is inappropriate. The Special Committee respectfully requests that you take action to eliminate the police and fire protection fee in favor of the uniform statewide 911 user fee proposed by the Special Committee, or that you repurpose this fee for 911 service and eliminate the current landline 911 user fee.

Thank you for your attention to this request, and please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Representative Joan Ballweg, Chair
Special Committee on 911 Communications

Senator Robert Jauch, Vice Chair
Special Committee on 911 Communications

JB:RJ:ksm

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