

# ***Preliminary Report to the Alabama Legislature***

## **Alabama Emergency Communications District Long-Range Study Commission**

The Alabama Emergency Communications District Long-Range Study Commission (“Commission”) was created by §11-98-7.2 and was charged with reviewing the operation of Emergency Communications Districts (“ECDs”) and the 9-1-1 system in Alabama as it currently exists and any related the long range issues. The Commission was required report to the Legislature by no later than the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the 2008 Regular Session of the Legislature. The Commission is dissolved on June 1, 2008.

It is important to note that the Commission has been hampered in its review and in making comprehensive recommendations for legislative changes because of the relatively short time between the creation of the Commission (August 2007) and its required reporting date in February of 2008. This report represents an overview of the work and activities of the Commission, but has not been adopted by official vote of the Commission. The Commission intends to continue its work until June 1, 2008 and reserves the privilege of amending and/or adding more specific recommendations to this preliminary report, making a final report to the Legislature on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of the 2008 Regular Session.

At its first meeting, the Commission organized three working subcommittees based on the specific areas of study and review in §11-98-7.2 (1)-(8). This report is also organized into these categories.

Administrative

Revenue

Network and Infrastructure

Each of these Sub-Committees heard from subject matter experts, reviewed best practices, and studied examples from other States. The Sub-Committees also worked to identify issues impacting the effective operation of the local ECDs.

The commission is also in the process of conducting a survey of the EDCs to gather and analyze information regarding the financial and administrative operations of all the ECDs in Alabama. Auburn University’s Center for Governmental Services was engaged to analyze the data from the survey results. Although a response had not been received from each ECD at the time of the submittal of this report, a preliminary analysis is attached, containing analyzed data from the ECD’s who have reported back to the Center for Governmental Services thus far. A complete analysis will be included in the final report by the Commission.

## ***ADMINISTRATIVE***

Alabama has a Commercial Mobile Radio Service (“CMRS”) Board whose sole purpose is to receive monthly E9-1-1 fees collected from wireless telecommunications customers by their service providers. The Board then makes disbursements to the ECDs and wireless carriers. There is no comparable statewide board for receiving and disbursing E9-1-1 fees collected from wireline telecommunications customers by their service providers. Those fees are submitted directly to the ECDs by the wireline service providers. In addition, no statewide board exists to perform any administrative support for E9-1-1 operations in Alabama, to provide either short-term or long-term coordinated planning and oversight, or to coordinate E9-1-1 standards and training for Alabama’s 9-1-1 system.

The Administrative Subcommittee focused on recently enacted legislation in other states. Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina approved legislation during 2007 that created state administrative oversight for all 9-1-1 in those states.

The Florida Emergency Communications Number E9-1-1 State Plan Act created a nine-member state board to provide administrative support for E9-1-1 in that state and designated the Technology Program within the Department of Management Services (DMS) as overall E9-1-1 system coordinator. The board receives and disburses E9-1-1 fees collected from both wireless and wireline telecommunications customers by their service providers. The Florida Legislature authorized the board to adopt rules for E9-1-1 administration in the state, to adjust the E9-1-1 fee, to change the disbursement allocations, and to issue grants to the ECDs based on need.

As the state 9-1-1 system coordinator, the DMS Communications and Information Technology Services (CITS) organization is responsible for developing a statewide emergency number 9-1-1 plan, coordinating effective delivery of 9-1-1 services statewide, and for overseeing administration of 9-1-1 fees. The DMS also assists counties with technical standards and operational capabilities, assists with designing and implementing new systems, inspects all Public Safety Answering Points (PSAP) to ensure compliance with the state 9-1-1 plan, assists with county 9-1-1 coordinator training, and monitors all federal and state 9-1-1/E9-1-1 issues.

North Carolina likewise created a single statewide 9-1-1 board for consolidation of both wireless and wireline E9-1-1 administration. The board is constituted under the North Carolina Office of Information Technology. The board receives and distributes E9-1-1 fees collected from wireless and wireline telecommunications customers by their service providers. The board also adopts policies and procedures for statewide E9-1-1, creates and issues grants for ECDs based on need, and coordinates advisory services and training for PSAPs.

The Georgia State Assembly amended the Georgia Emergency Telephone Number 9-1-1 Service Act during its 2007 General Session. The Assembly created, under the Georgia Emergency Management Agency, a single statewide 9-1-1 advisory committee for E9-1-1 wireless and wireline administration. The board does not collect and distribute E9-1-1 fees but does identifies and recommend changes necessary for the assessment and collection of fees,

promulgates guidelines for implementing the state 9-1-1 system, creates and issue grants to ECDs based on need, and assists in training of PSAP personnel.

The Florida Board and Georgia's Advisory Committee must submit an annual report to the legislative body that created them, providing the status of E9-1-1 in their state, an analysis of E9-1-1 expenditures and the use of funds in each ECD, and identifying any changes necessary to improve the delivery of emergency telephone service. The E9-1-1 board in North Carolina files a report to the governor and legislature in odd numbered years.

After further study of other state's current and proposed statutes with regard to E9-1-1, the Commission may recommend that the Legislature create a statewide board for wireless and wireline E9-1-1 administrative oversight in Alabama.

Alabama's 88 ECDs operate PSAPs throughout the State. In addition to the districts operating in each of Alabama's 67 counties, 21 of the PSAPs are exclusively serving municipalities (16 of which are in Jefferson County). ECDs administer the day to day operation of PSAPs by setting operational policies and hiring employees as needed to meet local needs. A list of ECDs is attached at the end of this report.

Many county ECDs provide emergency dispatch service to municipal police and fire departments, the Sheriff's Office, fire districts and volunteer fire departments, rescue squads and ambulance companies through the operation of consolidated dispatch centers.

At this time, the Commission does not recommend an alternative administrative model to manage the daily operation of PSAPs other than the existing ECDs. There must be a local entity to deal with personnel issues, dispatch policies, response boundary issues, building and maintaining 9-1-1 databases, and a myriad of other issues that come with operating an around-the-clock emergency service agency.

### ***Revenue - Income***

It is apparent to the Commission that the present funding model for the local 9-1-1 districts may require legislative changes to adapt to the ever changing telecommunications landscape. The current funding model, which includes a locally-levied fee on traditionally-delivered wireline services and a statewide fee on wireless services -- was established in the late 1980s when cellular phones were mounted permanently in cars, and Voice over Internet Protocol ("VoIP") service had not been invented.

In 2007, 9-1-1 calls made from cell phones represented at least 50 percent of the total call volume statewide and exceeded 60 percent in many urban areas. Revenue from wired telephones provides about 75% of the operating revenue of a typical local 9-1-1 call center.

The rate charged for wired phones is set by each ECD and varies from \$0.50 to \$3.48 per month per wired line while all cell phones pay \$0.70 per month. The average charge is about \$1.42 for residential and \$2.32 for business lines per month. Montgomery City and County are unique in that neither assesses a fee on wired phone service but receive allocations from both the Montgomery County Commission and the City of Montgomery.

The wide variance in 9-1-1 fees is due to several factors. ECDs covering areas with smaller population also have a fewer number of phone lines and typically charge more per line. Some ECDs do not fund the employees that answer 9-1-1 calls or dispatch emergency services. Some receive local government funding to meet the costs that exceed the amount collected from wired and wireless phones. The results of the final survey should provide a clearer picture of the funding alternatives for the ECDs and allow the commission to consider specific recommendations in this area.

Another significant issue is developing a means to collect a fair 9-1-1 fee from prepaid cellular service. Because such service is purchased from a variety of sources and may be utilized over a time period that is difficult to accurately control and predict, many challenges confront the efficient collection of the statewide wireless fee, which by law applies to those using prepaid services. Again, the short study time makes it difficult for the Commission to make a specific recommendation in this area. The Legislature is encouraged to closely monitor this issue and to anticipate legislation in the coming years.

### ***Revenue – Costs***

One of the largest expenses for the ECDs is the cost of purchasing 9-1-1 network and database services from the serving telephone company. AT&T (BellSouth) serves the vast majority of the local call centers and CenturyTel is second serving several in the southeast corner of the State. Several smaller Incumbent Local Exchange Carriers (ILECs) around the state provide 9-1-1 service direct to PSAPs, and some in conjunction with service also provided by AT&T.

In the mid 1980s the Alabama Public Service Commission (“PSC”) established the rates which the serving telephone companies may charge the local districts for 9-1-1 network and database services. The rates have not been adjusted or reviewed in the subsequent 20 years. A review of this rate structure is important to ensure the charges are in-line with current cost structures and technology changes. While this is not a legislative issue, the supplemental report of the Commission may contain a recommendation to the PSC regarding this issue.

There are many other assorted costs such as seen by any organization. The survey, once completed and fully analyzed, will provide a detailed analysis of the expenses and income of ECDs.

### ***NETWORK and INFRASTRUCTURE***

The existing network used to deliver 9-1-1 service has served the State well but will not currently support the Next Generation 9-1-1 network. The National Emergency Number

Association (“NENA”) is a professional association of ECD Board Members and PSAP Managers, Representatives from Telephone Companies, and Vendors who sell and support 9-1-1 networks, databases, and equipment. NENA is developing standards for the Next Generation 9-1-1 system, or as it is commonly called, NG9-1-1.

NG9-1-1 will use a private computer network based on Internet Protocol (IP) to deliver 9-1-1 calls and the associated data such as customer name and address or latitude and longitude locations. Because an IP network should be less expensive to build and operate, it is expected that future operational costs will go down.

NG9-1-1 will be easier to restore after a disaster such as a hurricane or a local event that might affect a single PSAP such as a tornado or fire. When a hurricane threatens, NG9-1-1 allows 9-1-1 calls to be routed to a PSAP located inland out of harm’s way. After a disaster, 9-1-1 calls can be routed outside the affected area rather than sending relief workers into a disaster area.

Legislation has been introduced during the 2008 session which would allow the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center (“ACJIC”) to share the IP network it operates with E9-1-1. The ECD members of the Commission report that their costs could be dramatically reduced by sharing network expenses with ACJIC. The proposed legislation does not mandate that any ECD use ACJIC for their 9-1-1 network, it merely enables this as an option. Although the full commission did not endorse the legislation, it is introduced by two Commission members, Sen. Ted Little and Rep. Mike Curtis.

NG9-1-1 is expected to bring competition to the 9-1-1 market. As has been seen in business and home phone service, competition results in a fair market price and encourages innovation. Another issue to be considered by the Commission is a recommendation that the PSC conduct a comprehensive review of the Alabama Incumbent Local Exchange Companies (“ILEC”) tariff prices for Emergency Reporting Services, 9-1-1, and verify correlation with the tariffed prices offered by comparable sized ILECs in other states.

Submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

Sen. Ted Little, chairman

## Alabama Emergency Communications Districts

<b>ECD Name</b>	<b>ECD Name</b>
Autauga County	Jefferson County
Baldwin County	City of Adamsville
Barbour County	City of Bessemer
Bibb County	City of Birmingham
Blount County	City of Fairfield
Bullock County	City of Gardendale
Butler County	City of Graysville
Calhoun County	City of Homewood
Chambers County	City of Hoover
Cherokee County	City of Hueytown
Chilton County	City of Irondale
Choctaw County	City of Midfield
Clarke County	City of Mountain Brook
Clay County	City of Pleasant Grove
Cleburne County	City of Tarrant
Coffee County	City of Vestavia Hills
City of Enterprise	Lamar County
Colbert County	Lauderdale County
Conecuh County	Lawrence County
Coosa County	Lee County
Covington County	City of Auburn
Crenshaw County	Limestone County
Cullman County	Lowndes County
Dale County	Macon County
City of Daleville	Madison County
Dallas County	Marengo County
DeKalb County	Marion County
City of Fort Payne	Marshall County
Elmore County	Mobile County
Escambia County	Monroe County
Etowah County	Montgomery County
Fayette County	City of Montgomery
Franklin County	Morgan County
Geneva County	Perry County
Greene County	Pickens County
Hale County	Pike County
Henry County	Randolph County
Houston County (Dothan)	Russell County
Jackson County	Shelby County
	St. Clair County
	City of Leeds
	Sumter County
	Talladega County
	Tallapoosa County
	Tuscaloosa County
	Walker County
	Washington County
	Wilcox County
	Winston County