

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 5335

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Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Revising the authority of the statewide enhanced 911 program to support the statewide enhanced 911 system.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Economic Development & Telecommunications (originally sponsored by Senators Snyder, Deccio, T. Sheldon, Morton, B. Sheldon, Hochstatter, Parlette, Sheahan, Hewitt, Haugen, Oke, McCaslin and Honeyford).

Senate Committee on Economic Development & Telecommunications
House Committee on Technology, Telecommunications & Energy

Background: In 1991, voters adopted Referendum 42, requiring enhanced 911 (E-911) service to be available throughout the state by December 31, 1998. The Military Department is responsible for statewide coordination of E-911 programs. Under the E-911 system, a caller's phone number and location are automatically displayed at the public safety answering point.

E-911 services are funded by county and state excise taxes. The state levies a maximum tax of 20 cents per switched telephone access line. Voters approved this state tax when they adopted Referendum 42. There is no state tax on radio access (wireless/cellular) lines. State tax revenues fund statewide coordination of the E-911 program and help counties to pay for the extra costs incurred in upgrading from a basic 911 system to an E-911 system.

In 1998, the Legislature found that some counties generate insufficient revenues to cover E-911 related salaries and operational expenses and authorized state E-911 funds to provide temporary salary assistance to small counties or ongoing salary assistance to counties that have regionalized their operations. To qualify for state E-911 salary assistance, a county must impose the maximum allowable county excise tax rate.

The maximum tax rate that a county may levy on a switched line is 50 cents. Counties may also impose an excise tax of up to 25 cents per month on each radio (wireless/cellular) access line. Thirty-eight counties impose the maximum rates.

Summary: Legislative findings are made, including that the Enhanced 911 system has served to further the health, safety, and welfare of Washington citizens and saved lives; and that statewide operation and management will improve the system by creating efficiencies, permitting greater local control, and providing needed support to counties.

The purposes for which the state E-911 funds may be used are changed. The specific limitations on salary assistance are removed and replaced with general authority to the state E-911 coordinator to enter into statewide agreements to improve the efficiency of 911 services.

Direction is provided to the state E-911 coordinator for adopting rules that define the allowable purposes based on specified priorities. The priorities are listed as follows: (1) assuring that 911 is operational statewide; (2) assisting as necessary to assure counties can achieve a basic service level for 911 operations; and (3) assisting counties as practicable with capital investments necessary to increase 911 effectiveness.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	48	0
House	95	1

Effective: July 1, 2001