

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5975

As Reported by House Committee On:
Technology, Telecommunications & Energy

Title: An act relating to coordinating emergency communications systems by forming the state interoperability executive committee.

Brief Description: Forming the state interoperability executive committee.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Technology & Communications (originally sponsored by Senators Reardon, Esser, Poulsen, Finkbeiner and Schmidt).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Technology, Telecommunications & Energy: 4/1/03, 4/2/03 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes a committee under the Information Services Board to develop policies, procedures, and plans to ensure emergency communications systems can communicate with each other across the state.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY, TELECOMMUNICATIONS & ENERGY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 16 members: Representatives Morris, Chair; Ruderman, Vice Chair; Sullivan, Vice Chair; Crouse, Ranking Minority Member; Nixon, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Blake, Bush, Delvin, Hudgins, Kirby, McMahan, Romero, Tom, Wallace and Wood.

Staff: Matt Cooper (786-7106).

Background:

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has required states to study their emergency communications systems. The Washington State Information Services Board established the State Interoperability Executive Committee (Committee) to conduct a preliminary review. This review found that a wide variety of agencies at all levels of government have responsibilities for providing public safety and emergency services. The Committee found that the ability of emergency personnel to communicate with each

other and with emergency services officials is key to providing emergency services and that emergency communications systems are essential to the life, health, safety, and welfare of both the citizens of Washington and emergency personnel.

Agencies at all levels are responsible for operating their own communications systems. There are numerous different types of communications systems available and currently in use. These systems range from technology dating from the 1960s to cutting-edge digital voice and data systems. The systems currently in use represent an estimated statewide investment of \$90 million.

Agencies often purchase dissimilar emergency communications equipment which may impede communication between neighboring agencies. A diversity of equipment and an increase in the number of agencies needing emergency communications systems has also created a need for a larger number of radio frequencies.

The FCC is the federal agency responsible for allocating radio frequencies. The FCC ensures that communications systems have discrete frequencies so as not to interfere with each other. In 2006 the FCC will be reorganizing and allocating new public safety radio frequencies to accommodate the increase in communications systems and new technology.

The Military Department is the state agency charged with planning and coordinating emergency responses and emergency communications. The Adjutant General is the Director of the Military Department.

Summary of Bill:

The State Interoperability Executive Committee (Committee) is established as a committee of the Information Services Board (Board). Committee members will be appointed by the Board from: the Military Department, the State Patrol, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Information Services, the Department of Natural Resources, state and local fire chiefs, police chiefs, sheriffs, and state and local emergency management directors. The chair and legislative members of the Board are non-voting members.

The Committee will develop policies, procedures, and recommendations to ensure the interoperability of emergency communications systems across the state to allow emergency services personnel and agencies to communicate freely across jurisdictional lines.

The Committee will serve as the point of contact with the FCC for issues relating to the allocation, use, and licensing of the radio spectrum for public safety and emergency communications systems.

By July 31, 2004, the Committee will conduct an inventory of all state and local government owned emergency services communication systems. Based upon the inventory and future needs, the Committee will develop a plan to ensure the interoperability of emergency communications systems. The Committee will consult with the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee on the inventory and planning process.

The inventory and plan will be presented to the Board and the Legislature according to a schedule. By December 31, 2003, the Committee will report on the inventory of all state government-owned public safety communications systems and by July 31, 2004, the Committee will report on the inventory of all public safety communications systems within the state. By March 31, 2004, the Committee will issue an interim report on a statewide public safety communications plan and deliver a final report by December 31, 2004.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not Requested.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: This bill is substantially the same as Substitute House Bill 1271.

State, county, and local governments have significant investments in emergency communications systems. Emergency communications systems are vital to being able to deliver emergency services to the public. Public safety agencies need to coordinate emergency communications systems and the delivery of emergency services to better serve the public.

This is an important bill that will move the state in the right direction and ensure that emergency services entities can communicate with each other. This will mean a more efficient use of tax dollars and better emergency services which will benefit the citizens of Washington.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Reardon, prime sponsor; Clark Palmer, Washington State Patrol; and Stuart McKee, Department of Information Services.