



Public Affairs Guidance



Background

In 1988, Hardin County Fiscal Court implemented a safety answering service to provide a single telephone number for emergency services known as E-911. At the time of its establishment, Hardin County Government provided for the funding of this vital service through a monthly fee levied on each landline telephone subscriber in Hardin County, which was collected through telephone providers. At the time of the established E-911 service and fee, most households communicated through landline telephones as there were few cellular telephones in existence. The fee levied on landline telephone service is the primary funding source and no longer supports the necessary maintenance and operation of an E-911 service due to the decline in landline subscribers.

Service fees are also levied upon cellular service. However, this fee is administered by the State of Kentucky – not Hardin County – which is then distributed to Kentucky counties based upon population. This distribution does not add enough funding to E-911 to meet the emergency needs of Hardin County or replace the funds lost from the decline in landline subscribers.

Goals of the E-911 Service

- Serve as the single interface between citizens with emergencies and Hardin County's first responders.
- Provide exact location services to first responders through existing and emerging technologies.
- Ensure quick and efficient response of emergency service providers to the exact location of an emergency to reduce response times and errors in an effort to increase citizens' safety and health.
- Relay "real-time" information to first responders through existing and emerging technologies.

Talking Points

- Issue: Funding
 - The current funding structure no longer supports the staffing and infrastructure costs of E-911. The **annual funding deficiency is \$240,743.63** over the last three fiscal years. Funding of **more than \$2 million** is required to finance a new transmission system and increase staffing to meet current demands.
- Issue: E-911 Fee
 - To make the proper investments into Hardin County's E-911 service and to **prevent catastrophic failure**, the E-911 fee must be collected through another, more equitable and fairer means. An E-911 annual fee is proposed at \$42 per year -- a modest \$10 annual increase -- for each occupied individual residential unit, and each occupied individual commercial, religious, charitable or educational unit upon each parcel of real property located within the territorial limits of Hardin County, as determined from the records of the Hardin County Property Valuation Administrator's office and Hardin County E-911. This approach will **improve the E-911 funding situation** by approximately \$600,000 per fiscal year.
- Issue: Current Infrastructure

- The series of towers, sensors, computers and radios that make up the E-911 service are severely outdated and fail on a regular basis. Over the past 12 months, the system has experienced **nine outages**. The system is subject to a **catastrophic failure at any time**.
- Issue: New Technologies
 - Today's technology offers opportunities to significantly increase responsiveness to citizens with emergencies. Modern technologies consist of reverse E-911 (smart E-911), texting, video messaging (i.e.: FaceTime) and digital radio transmission. **E-911 is unable to implement** these new opportunities due to the current funding constraints.
- Issue: Call Volume
 - The current staffing construct – restrained due to funding deficiencies – cannot meet the increase in call trajectory. E-911 calls are rapidly approaching an average of 1 per Hardin County citizen per year. Calls have increased from 71,800 in FY07 to 95,331 in FY17, **an increase of nearly 33% over ten years**.

Perspective from Emergency Responders

- E-911 Director Mike Leo: “We are maintaining our system through used parts the best we can. We’ve had communication towers down for days because we faced extreme difficulty finding replacement parts. We are lucky we didn’t have major emergencies during those periods. We are at a point where parts are becoming increasingly rare and a catastrophic system failure is imminent.”
- KY 911 Services Advisory Council Member & E-Town Police Chief Jamie Land: “Technological advances in E-911 has delivered the ability to text dispatch centers, which is a monumental advancement in providing domestic violence, robbery, burglary and assault victims a discreet form of communication. An upgrade to Hardin County’s systems would be a huge step forward in providing another tool to persons in situations where discretion increases their chances of survival.”
- Hardin County EMS Director Jamie Armstrong: “Our ambulances often respond to remote areas within the county where radio service is the only communication option. Without reliable radio service, we cannot receive adequate patient condition information to prepare our treatment plan nor transmit critical patient information to Hardin Memorial Hospital in advance of our arrival.”
- Hardin County Emergency Services Director Bryce Shumate: “When communication outages have occurred, first responders have had to use infrastructure from other agencies to communicate or relay information. If this were to occur during a mass casualty or other large scale event, the unexpected need to coordinate another problem and the resulting chaos would leave members of this community very vulnerable.”
- Hardin County Sheriff John Ward: “My officers are potentially in harm’s way every time they answer a call. We must have a communications system we can count on to work wherever we are in the county. Seconds may determine life and death and our radios must work when we push the button because, there likely will not be time to dig out a cell phone that may or may not have signal.”
- Valley Creek Fire Chief Joey Scott: “We’ve encountered system failures while responding to emergency calls. Not being able to communicate through the emergency system places life and property -- including our own -- in immediate danger. It decreased our response efficiency each time.”

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1) What are citizens paying now for E-911 service?
 - Hardin County citizens are currently paying \$2.74 per landline per month (\$32.88 per year), which is adjusted each year based upon the consumer price index (CPI).
- 2) How much funding does the current fee generate?
 - The current fee generates approximately \$1.050 million in revenue in a fiscal year.
- 3) How much will the new funding method provide E-911?
 - The new billing approach will improve the E-911 funding situation by approximately \$600,000 per fiscal year.
- 4) Is this fee imposed on cellular service?
 - Yes; the State of Kentucky has implemented a fee of \$.70 per post-paid cellular line and \$.93 per pre-paid cellular line. This money is distributed to E-911 services across the state based upon population. In FY 17, this generated approximately \$380,000 for Hardin County's E-911 service.
- 5) Why are upgrades to the system needed?
 - The current transmission system components are at the end of their life, meaning they are no longer manufactured and are severely outdated. As a result, replacement parts are becoming harder to locate delaying repairs and leading to decreased emergency responsiveness. In addition, the series of towers, sensors, computers and radios that make up the E-911 service are failing on a regular basis. Over the past 12 months, the system has experienced nine outages. The system is subject to a catastrophic failure at any time.
- 6) Why was the option to place the fee on property taxes chosen over other methods?
 - Other methods were explored and discussed such as, placing the fee on water bills, billing it separately through a private company and placing it on the trash bill. Placing the fee on the property tax bills will result in a fairer distribution of the burden of funding this service and create a more stable funding source. In addition, it is more efficient and a cheaper collection method as the Hardin County Sheriff is already collecting property taxes for the county. The Sheriff can collect this fee for less and also receive a portion of the funding for performing this function to fund more law enforcement activities.
- 7) How have other counties addressed this issue?
 - Significant evaluation of other systems was conducted. The most common method is adding the fee to the property taxes and using the sheriff's collection infrastructure for efficiency.
- 8) Is the additional fee on the property tax bill in addition to the landline fee?
 - No; adding the fee onto the property tax bills will **REPLACE** the current landline fee after a short phase-out period to ensure adding the fee to the property tax bill coincides with Hardin County's fiscal year.
- 9) Will the cellular fee remain on my cell phone bill?
 - Yes; the State of Kentucky administers this fee, not Hardin County. The funds are apportioned to the 911 services state-wide based upon population.
- 10) Can the funds generated from this fee be used for anything other than E-911 services?
 - No; all funds generated from E-911 fees must be used for that purpose **ONLY**.
- 11) How are residential, commercial, religious, charitable and educational units defined?
 - Residential unit: Defined as each residential space designed and/or utilized for occupancy for residential purposes and includes each apartment unit and mobile

home as a separate residential unit. For the year beginning January 1, 2018 only, owners of occupied rental units shall be eligible to claim a credit of \$21.00 per occupied unit against the annual fee per unit that is due. This credit, which is the equivalent of a 6-month portion of the fee, is granted in order to allow owners of rental property additional time to fully recover the amount of the fee from their tenants, as they determine. In subsequent years, the full amount of the annual fee shall be paid for all occupied units by the owner.

- Commercial unit: Defined as a non-residential building space of any size designed and/or utilized for occupancy by an individual non-residential business or public or private enterprise.
- Religious unit: Defined as a non-residential building space of any size designed and/or utilized for occupancy for religious activities and/or worship.
- Educational unit: Defined as a non-residential building space of any size designed and/or utilized for occupancy for the purpose of education, the administration thereof or extracurricular activities.

12) Is there an appeals process?

- Any appeal of an occupancy or individual unit determination may be made to the Hardin County Emergency Services Committee by December 15 of the year for which the fee is due.

13) Is this an optional fee?

- The failure of any owner of the real property of a residential, commercial, religious, charitable or educational unit to pay the E-911 fee as set forth in the Ordinance shall be punishable as a Class B Misdemeanor and/or by civil collection process.

14) Will the fee ever increase?

- The service fee shall increase or decrease in accordance with changes in the Consumer Price Index, all urban consumers, all items, unadjusted (1967=100) as published by U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, annually beginning January 2019 on a calendar year basis.

Points of Contact

- 1) Judge/Executive Harry L. Berry, 270-765-2350
- 2) Deputy Judge/Executive Daniel London, dlondon@hcky.org or 270-765-2350
- 3) Emergency Services Director Bryce Shumate, bshumate@hcky.org or 270-765-2350