




**State of Vermont**  
**Department of Public Safety**  
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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Senator Kitchel, Chair of Joint Fiscal Committee

FROM: Commissioner Jennifer Morrison, Department of Public Safety 

SUBJECT: Update on planned Congressionally Directed Spending Expenditures to Support Vermont's Transition to a Statewide Public Safety Communications System

DATE: September 7, 2023

**Mandate:** [Act 78 \(H.494\) An act relating to making appropriations for the support of government](#) (Appendix A)

(4) It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Department of Public Safety (DPS) seek to draw and deploy the \$9,000,000 in Congressionally Directed Spending to support Vermont's transition to a modernized, regional communications network in a manner that coordinates with and advances the goals of a statewide public safety communications system. The Commissioner of Public Safety shall consult with the Public Safety Communications Task Force as the federal parameters for expending the funds become available and as the Commissioner develops a plan to expend such funds. *In addition, the Commissioner shall update the Joint Fiscal Committee on planned expenditures.*

### Federal Funding:

The Department of Public Safety proposed to serve as the recipient/administrator of Congressionally Directed Spending, to award sub-grants to Vermont law enforcement agencies or partners to assist in the transition to a Regional Dispatch model. This intent was made clear in our initial request for the \$9,000,000 Leahy Congressionally Directed Spending Funds (CDSF) to support implementation / transition to statewide regional emergency communications.

- <https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/CJSFY23RPT.PDF>. Explanatory Statement for Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2023. Page 141.

When the funds became available for application, they came in via a COPS Technology funding stream. COPS Technology funding streams do not allow for subgrants. Additionally, at the time the grant application was made available, the legislature had not yet decided on the path forward for public safety communications. DPS applied for several extensions on the application date as well as made multiple requests to have the funding stream changed to allow for subgrants. Ultimately, we were able to get a grant application extension until August 28, 2023, but we were unsuccessful in changing the funding stream to allow subgrants.

### Stakeholder Input:

DPS sought ideas from stakeholders (Public Safety Communications Task Force, E911, Fire, EMS, Police) on how to most appropriately spend the funds without the ability to make subgrants. Two proposals were explored: 1) a statewide Computer Aided Dispatch System and 2) infrastructure enhancements for statewide public safety communications. Per the mandate, both proposals were brought to the Public Safety Communications Task Force for consultation. During the August 9<sup>th</sup> Public Safety Communications Task Force Meeting<sup>1</sup> options for CDSF were discussed. Another suggestion for spending



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<sup>1</sup> <https://dps.vermont.gov/committees-boards/communications/meetings>

the CDSF was proposed at that time, but ultimately the Public Safety Communications Task Force was in favor of enhancing infrastructure for public safety communications systems. It should be noted that the Public Safety Communication Task Force meetings and agendas are posted in advance, the meetings are open to the public and allow for public comment, and meeting minutes and a recording of the meetings are posted on the Department of Public Safety Communications Task Force Meetings website (<https://dps.vermont.gov/committees-boards/communications/meetings>).

**Planned Expenditures:**

The Vermont Department of Public Safety submitted the federal grant application to the Department of Justice’s Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Technology and Equipment Program (TEP) regarding the \$9 million congressionally directed spending funds on August 28, 2023. Below is an overview of the application.

The Department’s proposal is to improve resilience, redundancy, and reliability of the State of Vermont Land Mobile Radio (LMR) network, enhancing performance for all agencies that utilize and/or are dispatched on the network. This will support first responders statewide by improving network availability during public safety emergencies. Many regional dispatch agencies utilize these LMR networks to support first responders, either as a primary service, during off-peak hours, in areas that their service does not reach, or as backup for redundancy. Much of the underlying infrastructure supporting the network is shared and supports municipalities, counties, regional dispatch, and state entities.

Dispatch agencies that do not presently use the LMR network for primary dispatch, as well as out-of-state first responders (stationed in Vermont) benefit from the interoperability channels (VCOMM), especially during statewide emergencies. These dispatch agencies could benefit from this investment if their services were integrated into the LMR network, such as by deploying their radios at existing LMR sites. Backhaul connectivity from these dispatch agencies to the LMR tower sites could be arranged over the existing microwave network. Regional dispatch centers rely on State dispatch resources for redundancy and fail over. Equipment upgrades are necessary to ensure performance and reliability of these services. Viable equipment replaced by this grant may be repurposed to other agencies to support statewide emergency communications.

The LMR network will form the backbone of a future statewide multi-user trunked radio network. This one-time investment to improve the LMR network will enhance the work of the Regional Dispatch Task Force created by the Vermont Legislature by providing a more robust starting point for that work.

The proposal consists of 10 individual projects, Project management, Administration, and funds for an Independent Review totaling \$9M described in the budget details.

**Budget & Associated Documentation:**

	<b>Project</b>	<b>Budget</b>
1	COLOCATION SITE RESILIENCE AND EXPANSION	\$2,263,719.66
	Collocation site resilience and expansion will provide additional redundancies for the microwave ring backhaul and also expand LMR coverage. The project includes purchase and deployment of hardware and software at co-location sites, non state-owned facilities. This would add eight new sites for coverage expansion, including two in the NEK. It also includes a wireless connection to all LMR sites that presently rely on telco landline services.	
2	STANDBY GENERATORS	\$148,500.00
	Standby generators are part of the communication center structure. Generators ensure that the systems remain operational during extended power outages and recharges the site batteries.	
3	P25 ENGINEERING AND DESIGN SERVICE STATEWIDE EXISTING PROPAGATION	\$250,000.00
	Currently transitioning to P25 digital radio systems. Systems operate differently than the legacy analog systems and design specifications are essential to ensuring the coverage meets the expectations of public safety	
4	MICROWAVE ANTENNA SYSTEMS UPGRADE AND IMPROVEMENTS	\$1,140,403.48

	The microwave antenna systems are in integral part of the LMR backhaul communication solution. The current microwave dish / antennas are greater than 15 years old and are displaying signs of aging and have been sporadically failing. Replacement of these antennas enhances the reliability of the LMR network.	
5	BATTERY AND RECTIFIER SYSTEMS IMPROVEMENTS	\$398,408.22
	Increasing the battery capacity at our communication sites, ensures the site stays operational during extended power outages.	
6	TEST EQUIPMENT	\$300,000.00
	Updating test equipment, ensures that all communications systems tested are operating fully per manufacturer specifications.	
7	ANTENNA COMBINER SYSTEMS	\$433,552.00
	Combiners provide the ability to manage and mitigate intermodulation interference, reduce tower loading, and in-band interference is controlled at our remote communication sites.	
8	GROUND SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS	\$49,500.00
	Grounding systems, provide electrostatic discharge and lightning strike protection for our systems. Ensuring these systems meet current standards and are fully operational are essential in our communications network.	
9	RADIO DISPATCH - RADIO UPGRADE AND IMPROVEMENTS	\$1,108,367.10
	Dispatch systems located within the dispatch center is installed in cabinets or radio console furniture. This furniture provides electrostatic discharge protection, grounding, and security for the installed systems. Communication consoles are the control point for our various communications systems. These systems are used by the dispatch staff and controls the various transmitters used to dispatch calls for service. Console screen input systems provide the interface between the radio console hardware and the dispatcher. These devices are extensively operated causing a significant failure point. Replacement hardware ensures operational stability and reduces mean times between failures.	
10	VSP RADIO SYSTEM UPGRADE	\$2,519,810.50
	Replacing the aging state police (VSP) UHF radio hardware ensures platform stability and increases reliability across the network.	
12	Project Management	\$200,000.00
	Provide Project Management (PM) and Project Controls (PC) for the various complex initiatives defined in this grant. Oversight engagement shall include such activities as the State of Vermont procurement process, schedule development and reporting, risk and issue management, stakeholder engagement and scope control during the project's lifecycle.	
13	Administration	\$137,739.04
	DPS will bill the project for staff time utilized for these services to implement these projects. DPS may retain additional staff to support the project.	
14	Independent Review	\$50,000.00
	Individual projects may require independent expert review pursuant to Vermont statutes.	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$9,000,000.00</b>

**The Public Safety Communications Task Force Request for Proposals (RFPs):**

The Public Safety Communications Task Force RFPs have been put out for bid. Responses for the RFP for a Project Manager to assist the Task Force closes on 9/26/2023 and responses for the “big” RFP for Project and System Design are due on 10/13/2023. The Task Force anticipates significant expenditures to award contracts.

The Public Safety Communications Task Force has identified the need for independent legal counsel. The Task Force is in the process of creating an RFP to meet that need. This will be another expenditure of an unknown amount.

**Appendix A: Act 78 (H.494) An act relating to making appropriations for the support of government**

Sec. C.114 PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM; DISPATCH; INVENTORY; DESIGN

(a) The General Assembly finds that protecting public safety and welfare is an essential function of State government and it is in the public interest to establish a statewide reliable, secure, and interoperable public safety communications system, comprising integrated 911 call-taking and regional dispatch systems, and to ensure that the system is equitably and sustainably financed and universally accessible by all persons throughout the State.

(b) It is not the intent of the General Assembly to establish a public safety communications system that disrupts or in any way jeopardizes the exceptional dispatch services currently in place or the existing 911 system, but rather to support, enhance, strengthen, and build upon those efforts and initiatives.

(c) The transition to a public safety communications system as specified in subsection (a) of this section shall be overseen and managed by the temporary Public Safety Communications Task Force established in subsection (d) of this section.

(d)(1) There is established a Public Safety Communications Task Force to oversee and manage all phases of the development, design, and implementation of a statewide public safety communications system as required by this section.

(2) The Task Force shall consist of seven members as follows:

(A) the Executive Director of the Enhanced 911 Board, who shall serve as Co-Chair;

(B) the Commissioner of Public Safety or designee, who shall serve as Co-Chair;

(C) one municipal official appointed by the Executive Director of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns;

(D) one representative from a public safety answering point overseen by a municipal police department appointed by the Vermont Association of Chiefs of Police;

(E) one emergency medical technician or paramedic appointed by the Vermont State Ambulance Association;

(F) one firefighter appointed by the Vermont State Firefighters' Association; and

(G) the Chair of the Regional Dispatch Working Group established by the General Assembly in 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 185.

(3) At its initial organizational meeting the Task Force shall elect from among its members a vice chair. Meetings may be held at the call of a CoChair or at the request of two members. A majority of sitting members shall constitute a quorum, and action taken by the Task Force may be authorized by a majority of the members present and voting. Except for those members regularly employed by the State, members are entitled to a per diem in the amount of \$150 for each day spent in the performance of their duties. All members, including members otherwise regularly employed by the State, shall receive their actual and necessary expenses when away from home or office upon their official duties pursuant to this section. A vacancy shall be filled by the respective appointing authority. If the Chair of the Regional Dispatch Working Group declines

to participate as a member of the Task Force, the Task Force shall appoint one member who shall have expertise relevant to the purposes of this section.

(4) The Task Force is authorized to retain a project manager and one or more additional consultants with relevant expertise in public safety communications technology, design, and financing to assist with the requirements of this section.

(5) The Department of Public Safety shall provide the Task Force with administrative services and support.

(6)(A) The Task Force, in consultation with the Secretary of Administration, shall develop procedures and best practices for State agency cooperation and coordination on matters of overlapping jurisdiction. The primary purpose of this subdivision is to ensure the Task Force has access to expertise and data related to its mission, including expertise within and data maintained by the Department of Public Service, the Agency of Digital Services, the Division of Emergency Preparedness, Response and Injury within the Department of Health, the Department of Taxes, the Agency of Transportation, the Enhanced 911 Board, and the Department of Public Safety.

(B) Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to waive any privilege or protection otherwise afforded information by law due solely to the fact that the information is shared with the Task Force pursuant to this subdivision.

(7) All meetings of the Task Force shall be open to the public and conducted in accordance with the Vermont Open Meeting Law. All records of the Task Force are subject to the Vermont Public Records Act.

(8) The Task Force shall cease to exist when a State entity authorized by legislative enactment to permanently oversee and manage the public safety communications system becomes operational.

(e) The establishment of a statewide public safety communications system shall occur in essentially three phases, which include data collection and analysis, design, and implementation. Certain aspects of each phase may occur simultaneously as deemed appropriate by the Task Force.

(1) Data collection and analysis. On or before September 15, 2024, the Task Force shall conduct a complete inventory and assessment of all aspects of dispatch service currently provided in Vermont and, to the extent possible, dispatch service currently provided outside Vermont for response agencies located in Vermont, which shall include:

(A) an inventory of all existing dispatch infrastructure and equipment, including facilities, hardware, software, applications, and land mobile radio systems, referring to and incorporating any existing relevant data collected by a State or municipal entity;

(B) the number of full-time and part-time personnel currently performing dispatch service, taking into account personnel who have other responsibilities in addition to providing dispatch service;

(C) the current total spending on dispatch service in Vermont that includes and itemizes for each municipality and dispatch center all federal, State, and municipal appropriations and fees, every contract for dispatch or first responder service, and projected budgets;

(D) identification of the communications dead zones in the State, meaning those areas that lack the infrastructure to support public safety landmobile-radio communications or cellular voice and data service, or both, and taking into consideration all cell towers, including those that are part of the FirstNet statewide public safety radio access network; cellular mapping efforts conducted by the Department of Public Service; and any existing, relevant mapping data collected by a dispatch center or other entity;

(E) with the assistance of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, a needs assessment to determine where and to what extent there are gaps in dispatch service or significant challenges to the delivery of dispatch service and to identify those municipalities that are likely to be most affected by either the curtailment of dispatch service from the two State-run public safety answering points or from a new financing mechanism for the continuation of such service;

(F) an assessment of the service provided by each dispatch center and identification of particular challenges or vulnerabilities, if any, including with regard to workforce, failover procedures, communications technology, costs, and governance; and

(G) collection and assessment of any other information the Task Force deems relevant.

(2) Design. On or before January 15, 2024, the Task Force shall develop findings and recommendations related to draft elements of a preliminary design for a public safety communications system, including identification of a proposed implementation timeline and any additional data and resources needed to develop a final design on or before December 15, 2024. The final design shall include:

(A) technical and operational standards and protocols that ensure an interoperable and resilient system that incorporates computer-aided dispatch systems and land mobile radios;

(B) technology life-cycle standards to ensure system and database upgrades are timely, sufficiently financed, and properly managed;

(C) system and database security and cybersecurity standards;

(D) continuity of operations standards and best practices that encompass failover procedures and other system redundancies to ensure the continuous performance of mission-critical operations;

(E) workforce training standards and other staffing best practices that support the retention and well-being of dispatch personnel;

(F) a resource allocation plan that ensures dispatch service is available in all regions of the State, including the establishment of new dispatch centers or expanded capacity and capability of existing dispatch centers, if deemed appropriate by the Task Force;

(G) a process for annually reviewing the budgets of dispatch centers;

(H) a recommended governance model to ensure effective State and regional oversight, management, and continuous improvement of the system, including identification of staffing or operational needs to support such oversight and management of the system;

(I) cost estimates for implementing the system in Vermont, including operational and capital costs;

(J) options for sustainably and equitably structuring the financing of the public safety communications system, taking into consideration:

(i) existing budgets for regional and local dispatch;

(ii) the population, grand list, and call volume of each municipality;

(iii) existing and potential State funding streams;

(iv) available federal funding opportunities for public safety agencies and emergency communications systems, including equipment, network infrastructure, and services;

(v) financing models adopted in other jurisdictions for public safety communications systems; and

(vi) any other standards or procedures deemed necessary or appropriate by the Task Force.

(f)(1) If the Task Force determines that sufficient minimum technical and operational standards have been developed to warrant the funding of one or more pilot projects, the Task Force may submit for approval a pilot project plan to the Joint Fiscal Committee in calendar year 2023.

(2) Pilot projects eligible for funding under this subsection may include new regional dispatch centers or expanded capacity at existing regional dispatch centers, provided the Task Force determines the pilot demonstrates project readiness and is otherwise consistent with the standards and purposes of this section.

(3) In evaluating proposed pilot projects, the Task Force shall give a high priority to projects in geographical areas of the State that presently face significant challenges with respect to reliably providing dispatch service.

(4) The pilot project plan shall include a description of each proposed project, the resources needed, and an explanation of how the project will align with, inform, and further the development of a statewide public safety communications system and ensure transparency and accountability particularly with respect to the expenditure of State funds pursuant to this subsection.

(5) The Joint Fiscal Committee is authorized to approve up to \$4,500,000.00 in total for pilot projects authorized by this subsection.

(g) On or before January 15, 2024, the Task Force shall submit a progress report on the data collection and analysis required by subdivision (e)(1) of this section, the findings and recommendations required by subdivision (e)(2) of this section, and a description and status report of any pilot projects funded pursuant to subsection (f) of this section in a written report to the Senate Committees on Government Operations and on Finance and the House Committees on Government Operations and Military Affairs, on Ways and Means, and on Environment and Energy. On or before December 15, 2024,



the Task Force shall submit to the same legislative committees a written report containing its final design plan as required by subdivision (e)(2) of this section.

Sec. C.115 2022 Acts and Resolves No. 185, Sec. B.1100 is amended to read:

Sec. B.1100 FISCAL YEAR 2023 ONE-TIME GENERAL FUND

APPROPRIATIONS

\* \* \*

(b) \$11,000,000 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Public Safety for regional dispatch funding.

The funds are subject to the following conditions:

(1) \$4,500,000 shall be held in reserve until the report required by Sec. E.209.1 of this act is submitted and further approval to expend the funds is granted by the General Assembly Up to \$1,000,000 shall be available for the retention of technical experts to assist the Task Force with the analysis and planning required by Sec. C.112 of this act and to fund the administrative expenses incurred by the Public Safety Communications Task Force. If the Task Force determines in calendar year 2023 that additional funding is necessary to achieve its purposes, it may submit a request to the Joint Fiscal Committee. The Joint Fiscal Committee is authorized to approve up to an additional \$1,000,000.

(2) \$6,500,000 to provide grants to regional dispatch facilities upon approval of the Joint Fiscal Committee subsequent to review of a Regional Dispatch Facility grant plan submitted by the Commissioner of Public Safety. The plan shall include the extent to which federal funding sources may be available for regional dispatch Up to \$4,500,000 shall be available to provide funding for pilot projects pursuant to Sec. C.112(f), of this act.

(3) Any remaining amounts not obligated pursuant to subdivisions (1) and (2) of this subsection (b) shall be held in reserve until approval to expend the funds is authorized by further enactment of the General Assembly.

(4) It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Department of Public Safety seek to draw and deploy the \$9,000,000 in Congressionally Directed Spending to support Vermont's transition to a modernized, regional communications network in a manner that coordinates with and advances the goals of a statewide public safety communications system. The Commissioner of Public Safety shall consult with the Public Safety Communications Task Force as the federal parameters for expending the funds become available and as the Commissioner develops a plan to expend such funds. In addition, the Commissioner shall update the Joint Fiscal Committee on planned expenditures.

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