

Date of Hearing: March 21, 2011

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON UTILITIES AND COMMERCE  
Steven Bradford, Chair  
AB 770 (Torres) – As Introduced: February 17, 2011

SUBJECT: Emergency telephone systems.

SUMMARY: Expands the size and responsibilities of the State's 911 Advisory Board (advisory board). Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires the State Chief Information Officer (CIO) to review and update standards for recruitment and training of public safety dispatchers when reviewing and updating technical and operational standards for public agency systems.
- 2) Adds one representative from the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training and a representative from the Office of the State Fire Marshal to the advisory board.
- 3) Modifies the requirement that the advisory board advise the Chief Information Officer (CIO) concerning the following:
  - i. Issues related to the receipt of calls in a language other than English by dispatchers at a public safety answering point;
  - ii. Need for additional recruitment of multilingual public safety dispatchers; and
  - iii. Need to create standardized basic and advanced training programs for all dispatchers assigned to a public safety access point (PSAP).
- 4) Makes technical changes to conform to the Governor's Reorganization Plan No. 1 of the 2009-10 Regular Session.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Creates the Warren-911-Emergency Assistance Act establishing the number "911" as the primary emergency telephone number for use in California.
- 2) Requires local agency providers to develop systems for receiving 911 calls and relaying them to the appropriate responders.
- 3) Requires the CIO to review and update technical and operational standards for public agency systems, after consultation with specified entities and individuals.
- 4) Creates the advisory board to advise the CIO on several subjects, including technical and operational standards for the California 911 system, training standards for county coordinators and public safety dispatch center managers.
- 5) Requires that multilingual operators be on duty or available via conference at all times at those "911" public safety dispatch centers serving an area where 5 percent or more of the

population speaks a specific primary language other than English.

- 6) Establishes the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) within the Department of Justice.
- 7) Requires POST to adopt, and authorizes POST to amend from time to time, rules establishing minimum standards relating to the recruitment and training of local public safety dispatchers.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS: According to the author's office, this bill addresses potential improvements in the procedures for recruiting, training, and ongoing skill development for 911 dispatchers. 911 dispatchers perform a crucial function in the public safety system. Their job is high stress and demands precise performance in order to effectively relay calls to the appropriate response entity. Due to the nature of 911 dispatching, recruitment and job creation is a problem in this line of work.

1) Background: In 1976, the Warren-911-Emergency Assistance Act (911 Act) was passed into law in order to shorten the time required for a citizen to request and receive emergency aid. The 911 Act named the Department of General Services (DGS) as the state oversight entity to ensure cooperation between the public agencies, public safety agencies, and telephone service areas that were involved in its implementation. Since DGS had no expertise in this subject area, the 911 Act also created the advisory board in order to advise DGS on a number of specific issues, including technical and operational standards for the 911 system and training standards for county coordinators and dispatch center managers. As part of the Governor's 2009-10 Reorganization Plan, the Telecommunications Office of DGS was consolidated under an expanded office of the CIO.

POST was established by the Legislature in 1959 to set minimum selection and training standards for California law enforcement. Participation in POST is voluntary. Over 600 agencies statewide have chosen to participate. Participating agencies agreed to abide by the standards established by POST. POST provides over two dozen dispatcher training courses, including basic and advanced public safety dispatcher courses for participating agencies.

2) Need for additional multilingual public safety dispatchers: This bill would require the advisory board to advise on issues concerning the receipt of call in a language other than English by public safety dispatchers and the need for additional recruitment of multilingual dispatchers. Clear communication between the dispatcher and a person requesting emergency service is very important. Under the basic 911 system, when an individual calls 911, the dispatcher does not automatically receive the caller's phone number and location, thus the dispatcher needs to be able to understand this information when it is relayed to them. Moreover, the dispatcher needs to understand the nature of the emergency in order to ensure they can dispatch the appropriate responders.

According to data from the 2000 census, California leads the nation in the percentage of people who speak a language other than English at home, which is around 40 percent. More importantly, it found that over 11.5 million households in California were linguistically isolated, defined as having no member fourteen years old or older who speaks English well. These findings may illustrate the need for multilingual intake capabilities at dispatch centers.

Since there are hundreds of different languages spoken in California it may be impossible to have dispatchers available at all times that will be able to serve all non-English calls. In order to help deal with this issue, in 2005 DGS designated a foreign language emergency translation service provider for the entire state that supports 150 different languages. Under a multi-year agreement, the provider was to support over 500 public safety dispatch centers. A number of other public emergency response entities have implemented similar services over the past decade, most notably the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Therefore it is unclear if there is a need for additional dispatchers that are multi-lingual due to the adoption of translation services by DGS.

3) Standardized training: This bill requires the advisory board to advise the CIO on the need to create standardized basic and advanced training programs for all public safety dispatchers. PSAPs vary in terms of the types of training they offer. Currently, POST offers a 120 hour course for public safety dispatchers and various courses for upgrading skills. Some PSAPs, such as the Los Angeles Police Department, have their own training for dispatchers, which has been certified by POST. According to the author's office, other dispatch centers provide no training at all.

4) Technical amendment: The Office of the State Chief Information Officer (OCIO) has been renamed the California Technology Agency in accordance with AB 2408 (Smyth), Chapter 404, Statutes of 2010. Consequently, the references to the CIO should be replaced with the California Technology Agency.

5) Related legislation: This bill is substantially similar to AB 423 (Torres) in the 2009-10 Regular Session. This bill was vetoed by the Governor.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file.

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: DaVina Flemings / U. & C. / (916) 319-2083