



911 Service in Pennsylvania

An Overview



pennsylvania
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

in partnership with



Overview of Pennsylvania's 911 System

The ability to quickly access 911 is a vital part of the public safety system. It is the **critical link** between people who **need** help and the people who are **trained** to help.

In Pennsylvania, the heart of our 911 system is comprised of county-based call centers (referred to as Public Safety Answering Points, or PSAPs) and their highly trained staff of telecommunicators. The delivery of 911 services requires a combination of personnel, facilities, and complex systems and technology to be available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to ensure that both the public and field responders receive the level of service that is expected and required in emergency situations.

Each day, Pennsylvania's telecommunicators work around the clock to keep us safe and are responsible for performing multiple tasks, such as providing life-saving instructions to callers, coordinating resources for an incident response, and ensuring the safety of first responders in the field.

Pennsylvania PSAPs process **more than 15 million** requests for service each year.



911: Pennsylvania's **FIRST** first responders

*When an expecting mother was home alone and unexpectedly went into labor, a **Lancaster County** 911 telecommunicator walked her through the delivery process - even providing instructions on tying off the umbilical cord! The telecommunicator remained on the line until EMS arrived, making sure both the mother and her new baby boy were doing well.*

Roles and Responsibilities:

Chapter 53 of Title 35 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes outlines the powers and duties for the key stakeholders in Pennsylvania's 911 system:

- **Counties** are responsible for providing 911 within their jurisdiction by either operating a PSAP or by participating in a regional partnership. Two examples of regional partnerships would be **Cameron** contracting with **Elk** for 911 service or **Snyder** and **Union** forming the *Central Susquehanna Regional 911 PSAP*.
- **PEMA** supports counties with activities related to funding, planning, coordination, and oversight and administers the statewide Next Generation 911 service contract.
- **911 Advisory Board** advises PEMA on the administration of Pennsylvania 911 systems. The Board has representation from the General Assembly, Counties, State Agencies, and a variety of public safety, industry, and government associations.



911 System Funding in Pennsylvania

The 911 fee authorized by Act 12 of 2015 is the primary funding source for the critical 911 systems and personnel that provide life-saving services every day in Pennsylvania. The Governor's 2023-24 Executive Budget supports counties by including additional funding for the 911 system, one of the most important functions of public safety. The budget seeks to eliminate the Gross Receipts Tax and Sales and Use Tax imposed on wireless services and establish a multi-purpose emergency communications fee to support 911 & 988 services.

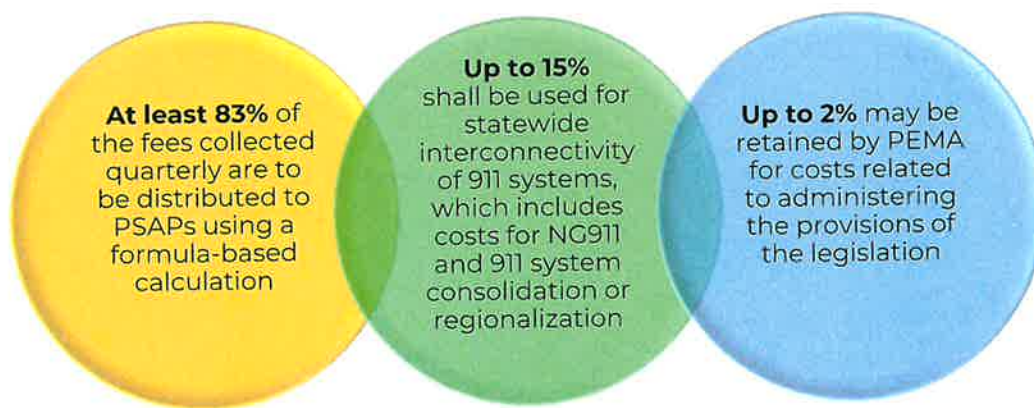
911 system **costs not covered by the 911 fee are typically funded by county property tax dollars** or other local revenue sources. As technologies continue to evolve and funding streams no longer align with current realities, counties need to be able to rely on consistent and sustainable funding to maintain their responsibility as the first line of emergency response.

Between 2016 and 2021:

- 911 fee collections have **averaged \$318 million annually**
- 911 fee collections have **increased by only 3%** during this timeframe
- Consistent revenue levels have provided budget certainty
- However, **revenue has not kept pace** with needs and rising costs of 911

911 Fee Distribution:

The distribution of 911 fees as required by Chapter 53 is outlined below. Revenue distribution percentages may vary annually based on 911 system needs and obligations.



911 System Expenditures:

In the U.S., each state establishes eligibility rules for 911 fee expenditures based on its individual needs and circumstances. Pennsylvania's eligibility rules support activities related to 911 call delivery, processing, and dispatch – all of which align with the Federal Communication Commission's rules for acceptable uses of 911 fees.

911 System Costs in 2021:

- **\$441.7 million** was the cost to provide 911 service in PA during 2021
- The **911 fee covered 73%** of 911 system costs in 2021
- **Counties contributed \$88 million** towards 911 service in 2021



911 Fee Administration and Oversight:

Pennsylvania has taken considerable actions to ensure 911 fees are used for 911 service.

Actions to Protect 911 Funding:

- PA law prohibits the use of 911 fees for non-911 purposes
- Eligible uses of 911 fees have been defined for PA and align with FCC rules
- Strong financial reporting requirements have been established for PA PSAPs
- PEMA reviews all costs funded by 911 fees to verify compliance with eligibility rules
- Each county's use of 911 fees is audited by a third-party auditor, as required by law
- Detailed financial info is provided to the General Assembly and public annually

911 System Improvements, Efficiencies, and Future Technologies:

Between 2005 and 2015, 911 system costs increased, on average, by 5.8% per year. The annual rate of **expenditure growth was reduced to 3.7% between 2016 and 2021** as Pennsylvania 911 systems progressed from a county focus (prior to Act 12) to the regional focus we have today.

Pennsylvania's 911 system stakeholders continue their work to implement strategies for managing costs while making targeted investments in system improvements, system regionalization and consolidation, and future technologies such as Next Generation 911. Here are some examples:

SAVINGS IN ACTION

By participating in shared systems projects, 14 southwestern PA counties are **saving \$1.2 million** in annual operating costs and have **avoided \$11.3 million** in non-recurring costs.



4 PSAP consolidations have occurred since 2016



54 PSAPs are participating in a shared system to find cost/operational efficiencies



The annual cost for NG911 call delivery is **fixed and level through 2030 for all PSAPs**

Future Challenges and Opportunities:

While Pennsylvania has taken notable measures to control 911 system costs, **our 911 system costs grew by \$112 million (or 34%)** between 2016 and 2021. For comparison, the nationwide cost for 911 increased by \$2 billion (or 58%) over that same period. 911 system costs are anticipated to increase in the following areas:

- **Personnel:** PSAPs across the country are facing an unprecedented staffing crisis and will need to invest more in telecommunicator recruitment and retention
- **Technology/Operations:** Critical systems must be maintained for 24x7 operations
- **Next Generation 911:** NG911 will continue to introduce new costs in areas such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), training, cybersecurity, and connectivity
- **Ancillary services:** Pennsylvania will have opportunities to leverage the Emergency Services IP Network (ESInet) for shared systems, public safety applications, and other regionalization efforts



Comparison of 911 Systems Among States

States have established legislation, funding structures, eligibility rules, and financial reporting requirements for 911 to suit their respective circumstances – with limited federal guidance. As a result, a standard comparison among state 911 systems is difficult to achieve.

Number of PSAPs: Pennsylvania has a consolidated 911 system compared to states of similar size. **We are one of only 13 states** that operates fewer primary PSAPs than there are counties.

Pennsylvania's consolidated approach toward the number of PSAPs allows for the provision of 911 in an **efficient and cost-effective manner** without sacrificing the quality of 911 services for our citizens.

State	2021 Pop.	PSAPs
Florida	21,828,069	141
New York	19,857,492	150
Pennsylvania	13,012,059	61
Illinois	12,686,469	183
Ohio	11,764,342	153
Georgia	10,788,029	155

Expense Eligibility Rules: Each state generally incurs the same types of costs related to call delivery, call processing, and dispatch functions to provide 911 service – but the eligibility rules and the method for funding these 911 costs will differ by state.



Pennsylvania's relatively small number of PSAPs has allowed us to establish more-inclusive eligibility rules that allow a broader spectrum of 911 costs to be funded by the 911 fee, while **limiting the burden on local taxpayers** as much as possible.

Financial Reporting Requirements: The Federal Communication Commission's annual *911 Fee Reports* document is a primary source of information about state 911 systems. Some limitations of the FCC reports are that financial reporting requirements and capabilities vary by state, or they may only report costs that are funded by a 911 fee.



In contrast, **Pennsylvania has comprehensive financial reporting requirements** that require PSAPs to report all costs for 911 in a standardized manner, regardless of funding source. As a result, our costs will appear higher than many other states.

Variety of 911 Fees: Factors such as population, the number of PSAPs, eligibility rules, legislation, costs, and others may impact a state's 911 fee rate. Act 12 of 2015 authorized a \$1.65 monthly 911 fee in Pennsylvania. Below are some notable differences in state 911 fees:



- **8 states** allow a 911 fee rate higher than \$1.65
- **18 states** have established percentage-based fees on prepaid wireless service
- **4 states** have established a percentage-based fee on other service types



Impact of Supportive 911 Legislation

PEMA, our county partners, the 911 Advisory Board, and 911 system stakeholders have built a collaborative relationship because of Act 12 and continue to implement many 911 system enhancements. Pennsylvania has many notable 911 accomplishments at the state, regional, and county levels. Together, we are prepared to usher Pennsylvania into a new emergency communications era with the continued support of the General Assembly.

- **Statewide 911 Plan.** A Statewide 911 Plan was adopted that planned for NG911 and established priorities for Pennsylvania 911 systems. Many of the action steps outlined in the Plan have been completed and thus has increased the capabilities of the 911 system.
- **Next Generation 911 in Pennsylvania.** A historic milestone was achieved in September 2022 when the first Pennsylvania PSAP was migrated to NG911 service. Since then, 21 of 61 PSAPs have been migrated to the NG911 system with the remainder by mid-2024.
- **Statewide 911 Management Information System.** A statewide MIS is being implemented as part of the NG911 project. The MIS will provide each PSAPs with near real-time information about the NG911 system and new reporting capabilities.
- **NG911 GIS Data Development.** Under Act 12, counties have made tremendous progress in developing robust GIS data layers that meet the rigorous standards to support 911 call delivery with Pennsylvania's NG911 system. There are 21 counties currently using their GIS data to support NG911 call delivery today.
- **New Training and Quality Assurance Requirements.** PEMA worked with the Board to update minimum training and quality assurance requirements for 911 personnel in Pennsylvania that were more than 20 years old.
- **Effective Statewide Interconnectivity Funding Management.** Allocating up to 15% of 911 fee collections for statewide interconnectivity of the 911 system was a forward-thinking provision in Act 12. These funds have been used to address aging systems within our PSAPs, support regionalization/consolidation, and fund our transition to NG911.
- **Developed and Deployed New 911 System Plan Process.** Our legislation requires each PSAP to maintain a 911 System Plan. A new 911 System Plan process was deployed in 2022 to facilitate statewide planning and coordination for our NG911 system, regional/shared efforts, and investments in system improvements and future technologies.
- **Expanded public education and outreach efforts.** Pennsylvania continues to develop NG911 educational materials such as the publicly-available [NG911 Progress Dashboard](#) and [NG911 Project Overview](#) document. PEMA has initiated the #IAm911 campaign to support county efforts with recruitment and retention of 911 personnel.

