
**SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, UTILITIES AND
COMMUNICATIONS**
Senator Ben Hueso, Chair
2019 - 2020 Regular

Bill No: AB 1168 **Hearing Date:** 6/18/2019
Author: Mullin
Version: 6/11/2019 As Amended
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Sarah Smith

SUBJECT: Emergency services: text to 911

DIGEST: This bill requires implementation of a text to 911 service that supports Short Message Service (SMS) and Real Time Text (RTT) messages by January 1, 2021.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes California's 911 telecommunications service, requires every local public agency operating firefighting, police, ambulance, medical, or other emergency services to establish and operate a 911 service, and requires Office of Emergency Services (OES) to coordinate the implementation of 911 systems and support local agencies in the operation and improvement of 911 systems. (Government Code §53100 et. seq./ Warren 911 Emergency Assistance Act)
- 2) Requires OES to develop a plan and timeline for the testing, implementation and operation of a Next Generation 911 (NG 911) emergency communication system, including text to 911 service, throughout California. (Government Code §53121)

This bill requires each public safety answering point (PSAP) to deploy a text to 911 service that allows an individual to text "911" for emergency services capable of accepting SMS and RTT messages.

Background

The Status of Next Gen 911. Public safety answering points (PSAP) are call centers that route 911 calls to emergency responders, including police, fire, and ambulance services. When a call is routed through a PSAP, it may contain information that can better enable rapid emergency response. When a 911 call is placed from a landline, the address associated with the phone numbers is routed

with the call. This information is more readily available for landline calls because landline phones have a fixed location. Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) calls can be placed from any location. Consequently, 911 dispatchers may require additional information to verify the location from which a 911 VoIP call is placed.

The legacy 911 system was originally designed for an analog and wireline telephone network. However, California's telecommunication landscape has changed dramatically since the establishment of the 911 system, and the use fixed location landlines is steadily declining. According to data from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), VoIP subscriptions exceeded wireline subscriptions in 2016. If the rate of VoIP adoption continues, analog phone systems may be completely replaced by digital and IP-based systems by 2030.

While consumers' telecommunications systems have changed dramatically in recent years, the 911 system has not yet been commensurately updated to reflect those changes. Existing law requires OES to develop and implement a NG 911 system, which will upgrade PSAPs to effectively receive and route calls occurring over an internet protocol and digital network. Under existing law, the NG 911 system must a text to 911 service. OES anticipates implementing NG 911 by the end of 2022, if sufficient funding is authorized. The Legislature is considering several proposals regarding NG 911 this year, including a surcharge that would help fund NG 911 systems, including text to 911. This bill would require text to 911 implementation to include SMS and RTT functionality by January 1, 2021.

Some counties have already implemented text to 911. However, it is unclear whether those counties are facilitating RTT messages. For example, Sacramento County has implemented text to 911, and the county indicates that persons with disabilities can use a text telephone technology (TTY) service to send messages through PSAPs; however, it is not clear if Sacramento's text to 911 system can facilitate RTT.

What is SMS and RTT? SMS and RTT are both text messaging systems that use communication protocols to transmit messages over telecommunication devices, including wireless phones. When a person uses SMS, the recipient only sees the message after the sender has typed the entire message and sent it. When a person uses an RTT service, the recipient sees the message in real time as it the sender enters characters. While SMS is a widely used instant messaging system that employs traditional communication protocols, RTT allows individuals who have specific speech and hearing challenges to have text conversations in real time as they were placing a call. Smart phones frequently have text telephone technology (TTY)/RTT functions that callers can enable; however, the availability of RTT

partly depends on whether carriers make the function available on their networks and settings for phones.

The FCC has provided guidance on how to implement RTT at PSAPs to support the use of NG 911. In 2016, the FCC adopted rules to facilitate the transition from TTY to RTT as a universal text message system enabling people who are deaf, blind, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability to communicate over wireless IP networks. In 2018, the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) provided guidelines to for PSAPs to comply with requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These guidelines outline a timeline for carriers to implement RTT functionality. Under this timeline, NENA expects all carriers to implement RTT on phones by June 30, 2021. This bill is generally consistent with efforts at the federal level to ensure that RTT is deployed by end of 2021 to facilitate text to 911 communication for populations that cannot use traditional calling functions.

Dual referral. Should this committee approve this bill, it will be re-referred to the Senate Committee on Governmental Organization for their consideration.

Prior/Related Legislation

AB 911 (Rodriguez, 2019) would require OES to establish a statewide system that would allow individuals to voluntarily provide health and safety information to first responders in an emergency if a 911 call is placed. The bill is currently pending in the Senate Committee on Governmental Organization.

AB 1121 (Padilla, Chapter 926, Statutes of 2014) required OES to develop a plan and timeline to test and implement a NG 911 system.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

SUPPORT:

American Academy of Pediatrics, California
California Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians
California Coalition of Agencies Servicing the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Service Center
Deaf Counseling Advocacy and Referral Agency
Greater Los Angeles Agency in Deafness, Inc.
NorCal Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Orange County Deaf Equal Access Foundation
The Arc California

United Cerebral Palsy California Collaboration

OPPOSITION:

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: According to the author:

As someone who is hard of hearing, I believe it is critical that we expand the ways people access 9-1-1 in an emergency. California companies are creating cutting edge technology on a daily basis and I believe we have the capability to launch Text to 9-1-1 statewide by 2021. This technology would be helpful to those who find themselves in situations where it might be too dangerous to dial 911. Scenarios could include domestic abuse situations, accidents that cause inability to speak or active shooter situations.

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