

Introduction

Text to 9-1-1 is no longer a capability that is on the horizon; it has become part of our 9-1-1 reality. At present, there have been only six deployments in Virginia, but PSAPs have expressed a strong interest in providing Text to 9-1-1 service to their citizens and many are moving forward with plans to deploy this technology. As a result, PSAPs will need resources to support their efforts. We need to act fast, but we also need to have direction. To this end, the E-911 Services Board established a Text to 9-1-1 Subcommittee to evaluate the feasibility of texting to 9-1-1 as a statewide initiative. The Subcommittee has assessed the feasibility of this task in this white paper and is proposing the following goal and supporting recommendations.

Goal: Establish ubiquitous Text to 9-1-1 service in the Commonwealth.

The Subcommittee can only recommend this goal. It will require strong centralized leadership and Board action to make this goal a reality. In order to achieve the outcome identified in the goal, the Subcommittee is recommending the following:

- **Encourage the pursuit of web browser Text to 9-1-1 solutions**

A baseline capability standard is needed to use as a platform from which to build towards a statewide deployment. The recommendation is that this baseline be a web browser text to 9-1-1 solution to provide the greatest flexibility to support future messaging capabilities. Basic web browser solutions are currently available to PSAPs at no cost; however, if any direct funding is provided by the Board, it should be contingent upon a PSAP pursuing this baseline standard.

- **Leverage text aggregator solutions to identify potential options for statewide use**

These solutions provide necessary enhanced capabilities such as a single web user interface and transfers of text sessions among jurisdictions with diverse PSAP CPE environments. Aggregators will also provide a clean interface point for incorporating “Over the Top” texts in the future. However, aggregator solutions come with one-time and reoccurring costs. The PSAP Grant Program may be a potential funding source for these costs.

In addition, it may not be necessary to negotiate a separate contract vehicle to use an aggregator solution for a statewide text to 9-1-1 solution. Current aggregator solutions may be appropriate for statewide use if the procurement included a purchase rider for other Virginia PSAPs.

- **Integrate statewide deployment of Texting to 9-1-1 with NG9-1-1**

Real potential for texting to 9-1-1 can be obtained by marrying this capability with a strategic outcome. The Subcommittee is recommending that texting to 9-1-1 be incorporated into NG9-1-1 planning as an initial step in overcoming the current limitation of statewide transferability. At this point, permanent standards have not yet been developed to support texting to 9-1-1 in an NG9-1-1 environment.

Since Virginia does not yet have an ESInet, PSAPs are currently unable to transfer 9-1-1 calls statewide. It is estimated that Virginia will not have an ESInet for at least another three years, but PSAPs can overcome the limitation of transferability for text sessions in the near future with an aggregator

solution. The aggregator would be replaced with a direct IP text to 9-1-1 solution once permanent standards and an ESInet are available.

Currently, Virginia PSAPs do not have a strategic guide to reference when making Text to 9-1-1 deployment decisions. This type of resource, which would focus on a standardized approach to deployments, is the first step in achieving the goal of ubiquitous Text to 9-1-1 service in the Commonwealth. To this end, the following topics were chosen by the Subcommittee to provide direction on how to address this gap for Virginia PSAPs:

1. Current Text to 9-1-1 technologies available
2. The pros and cons of each technology
3. Potential local costs
4. Deployment plans that have been tested in other states, regions, and localities
5. Deaf and hard of hearing community
6. Best practices and lessons learned from other states, regions, and localities
7. Next steps