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Testimony to Public Safety and Security Commission
HB 5378

Honorable Members of Public Safety and Security Committee;

As First Selectman of Washington and a Director of Litchfield County Dispatch representing the Northwest Connecticut Council of Governments I wish to submit testimony in favor of HB 5378, An Act Concerning The Maximum Surcharge For Enhanced 9-1-1 Service.

The current surcharge cap should be raised to \$.99 (ninety nine cents) per month to support needed improvements to Connecticut's emergency reporting system. The well documented success of 911 emergency reporting systems requires new funding to improve to "Next Generation 911" and replace aging, obsolete hardware and software which has been serving our municipalities, in some cases for 20 years. Additionally a partially completed fiber optic network linking the State Emergency Operation Center, local PSAP's, police, and fire departments has used up current funding and has not been completed. As has been demonstrated by recent events these additional links are critical to providing timely information to Connecticut First Responders and emergency service to its citizens.

To continue annual funding of Regional and Municipal PSAP's at the current level of support will require an increase to the surcharge cap as well. The current surcharge has maintained a level of funding that has encouraged the formation and expansion of regional centers as well as the merging of functions where efficiencies and cost savings are beneficial. Without an increase in the surcharge cap and the ensuing growth in O.S.E.T. fund availability, local municipalities will be asked to shoulder a much larger percentage of the operational and capital costs for this State mandated service.

However an increase in the Surcharge Cap to \$.99 will not automatically raise the cost of telecommunication to Connecticut residents but allow for future operational funding and needed capital investment. Any incremental surcharge change will be reviewed and approved by the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority and the ensuing public process will assure that the need for additional funds will be appropriately justified by the public service organizations they will benefit.

Sincerely,
Mark E Lyon
First Selectman, Washington