



State of Connecticut
SENATOR DONALD E. WILLIAMS, JR.
Twenty-ninth District
President Pro Tempore

Testimony

In Support of
SB 426 AA Suspending and Evaluating the Consolidation of Dispatch Centers within the
Division of State Police

Public Safety and Security Committee

Tuesday, March 11, 2014

Senator Hartley, Representative Dargan, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of **SB 426, AA Suspending and Evaluating the Consolidation of Dispatch Centers within the Division of State Police**. This bill would suspend the current administrative process of consolidation of police dispatch centers within the Division of State Police.

The consolidation plan—which was a department initiative and was not approved here in the legislature—would, if fully carried out, reduce the number of dispatch centers from 12 to 5. The Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) had originally hoped that the plan would result in greater efficiency and cost savings, however, it is not clear that the consolidation will result in economies of scale that will produce savings or faster response times; in fact it is possible that the consolidation will have the opposite effect.

While the consolidation plan was well intentioned, it failed to take into account the reality that many of these Troops function as local police departments serving many towns. The combination of shutting down troop barracks in the evening hours and closing down local dispatch service has changed the local connection between the Troop and the towns in the service area, and not for the better.

As a result of the consolidation plan, State Troopers no longer take phone calls from the public. In addition, the dispatch function is now separate from the call-taker function. Prior to the change at Troop D in Danielson, a State Trooper and a trained dispatcher would staff the call desk together. Both had the authority to immediately dispatch an officer to the scene. Now, at the consolidated dispatch center in Tolland, newly trained call-takers accept calls from the public and enter information into a database. A dispatcher is then notified after the information is entered and then makes a determination about whether or not to dispatch an officer to the scene.

It is difficult to see how this multi-step process creates efficiency or quicker response time. New call-takers are not given the authority or the ability to dispatch a trooper and may not be familiar with local geographical areas.

A recent incident in Windham highlighted an adverse outcome of the consolidation efforts. On January 20 of this year, two siblings were at home when burglars broke into the home. Several calls to the consolidated emergency dispatch failed to result in a timely police response due to confusion at the dispatch center as to the location of the home. Ninety minutes of no response elapsed. Luckily no one was hurt due to the intervention of a neighbor who heard the minors calling for help.

I would propose an addition to this legislation. We should not only halt the consolidation, but reverse that process. We should instruct the department to restore local dispatch in those Troops that serve areas where the majority of towns do not have local police departments, and by doing so restore 24-hour coverage at the barracks. The barracks should not be locked with the lights out when local residents need the emergency refuge and safety of the troop barracks.

When the department decided to pursue consolidation they overlooked an important consideration that argues in favor of local dispatch. More regional dispatch centers results in greater security for the residents of Connecticut. When there are only five such centers instead of 12, the impact of the loss of any one or more centers places a much greater burden on the remaining centers, and could leave vast areas of the state without the protection of public safety dispatch. Such loss could result from deliberate sabotage and disruption, or severe weather damage from hurricanes or tornados. Twelve regional dispatch centers are the equivalent of a system of public safety micro-grids; if one goes down there are numerous others that are powered up and ready to assume overflow calls. The previous system of local dispatch was not broken, and this new "fix" is not better and should be reversed.

In closing I want to again thank the committee for raising this bill, and urge amending it to include restoring local dispatch and overnight coverage at the Troop Barracks. Thank you.