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**State of Connecticut**

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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF**

**HOUSE BILL 5276: AN ACT REQUIRING INSTRUCTIONS FOR DIALING 9-1-1 ON OR  
ADJACENT TO CERTAIN MULTILINE TELEPHONES**

**Public Safety and Security Committee**

**March 1, 2016**

Good Morning Co-Chairs Senator Larson, Representative Dargan, Vice Chairs Senator Coleman, Representative Verrengia, Ranking Members Senator Guglielmo, Representative Zupkus; and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for raising this bill and giving me the opportunity to tell my story in support of *HB-5276 An Act Requiring Instructions for Dialing 9-1-1 on or Adjacent to Certain Multiline Telephones*.

Need help? Dial 911. That is the message our firefighters teach preschoolers when they visit during Fire Safety Week. In Danger? Dial 911. DARE Officers and Student Resource Officers make sure students understand how simple it is to get help. Every single one of us knows to pick up the phone and dial 911 if it is an emergency we need help. Except it is not always that simple. Sometimes you need to dial 9 first. Sometimes you need to dial 8 before you get an outside line. Sometimes you have no idea and a friend or loved one needs help.

Multiline Telephone Systems, MLTS, are not always configured to allow direct access to 911. Many also do not provide an onsite notification of the exact location in a Connecticut state building, major hotel, small employer, or in my case, a daycare center, where the emergency is located. This proposal is a low cost common sense solution to protecting Connecticut residents. A clearly labeled, inexpensive sticker will provide clear guidance on how to reach first responders. If this bill becomes law, when somebody needs to dial 911 from a landline, they will know exactly how to reach the help the desperately need.

More comprehensive legislation on this topic would require 3 steps, similar to the legislation passed in Texas after a young girl was rendered helpless in a hotel room as her mother was brutally stabbed to death. The young girl tried to dial 911 multiple times, but as it was a MLTS, she was unaware that she needed additional digits, or a prefix, to reach an outside line. The more comprehensive solution would require 911 calls uninterrupted access to 911 without a prefix, MLTS to provide onsite notification to a central location that an emergency call had been made, and include waiver provisions for hardships or special circumstances.

Telecommunications experts indicate most systems have the capacity to be reconfigured in their current state, without additional hardware, to allow unrestricted calls to 911. FCC Commissioner Ajit Pai himself stated in 2014 that “there does not appear to be any technical reason why modern MLTS can’t allow direct access to emergency personnel”.

I am attaching additional information for the Committee to review in the event members require additional information, including the OLR report I commissioned on the topic, and similar legislation from Texas, Illinois, Maryland and Suffolk County, New York.

Thank you for your consideration and support of this important proposal.



## 9-1-1 CALLS FROM MULTI-LINE TELEPHONE SYSTEMS

By: Veronica Rose, Chief Analyst

### MULTI-LINE TELEPHONE SYSTEMS

A multi-line telephone system, such as a private branch exchange (PBX), typically used in business environments, allows companies and organizations to have many phones in one location or many phones on one phone switch serving more than one geographic location. The system is characterized by a central switch and a number of extensions and usually requires users to dial an extra digit (such as "9") to reach an outside phone connection.

### ISSUE

Does state law require multi-line telephone systems to be configured to allow users to dial 9-1-1 directly? If not, has any legislation ever been proposed in Connecticut to this effect? Do other states require direct dialing?

### SUMMARY

Connecticut does not require direct 9-1-1 dialing from multi-line telephone systems (MLTS), such as those used in hotels and offices. No legislation has ever been proposed to this effect.

In May, Texas became the first state to require direct dialing of 9-1-1 from multi-line telephone systems. The law was named "Kari's Law" law in honor of the Texas woman stabbed to death in a hotel bathroom while her daughter tried unsuccessfully to dial 9-1-1, not knowing she

needed to dial "9" first to get an outside line.

Illinois and Maryland have followed Texas' suit and passed similar legislation. The Illinois bill (SB 3313) took effect on July 1, 2015. Maryland's bill (HB 1080) will take effect on October 1, 2015.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has weighed in on the issue and reports that substantial progress has been made in addressing the problem.

## **CONNECTICUT LAW**

Connecticut does not require direct dialing of 9-1-1, and no legislation has ever been proposed to require this. But, a 2006 bill (sSB 109) would have required MLTS operators to make all reasonable efforts to ensure that 9-1-1 callers were aware of the proper procedures for calling for emergency assistance, such as first dialing the number "9" to make an outside call. The Senate did not take up the bill and recommitted it to the Public Safety Committee.

## **KARI'S LAW**

A new Texas law (SB 788) requires all businesses that provide telecommunications services through a privately or publicly owned controlled telephone switch to configure the system in a way that allows users to directly access 9-1-1 service by dialing 9-1-1 without an additional code, digit, prefix, postfix, or trunk-access code.

The law is named in honor of Kari Rene Hunt who was attacked and stabbed to death inside a Texas hotel bathroom in December 2013 by her estranged husband. Her nine-year old daughter tried repeatedly to dial 9-1-1 from the room phone but could not get through because she did not know that the hotel phone system required her to dial '9' first to get an outside line to place the call.

Multi-line telephone systems, such as the system in the hotel in question, do not allow users to dial 9-1-1 directly. The system waits for a caller who dials 9-1-1 to enter additional digits. If the caller does not enter additional digits, the system returns a message to the effect that the "call cannot be completed as dialed." This is what happened in the Kari Hunt case.

On May 13, Texas governor, Gregory Abbott signed "Kari's Law" to "ensure that whenever there is an emergency, any child and any adult who dials 911 is going to be able to connect with emergency personnel."

## **FCC**

In response to the Kari Hunt incident, the FCC launched an inquiry to determine the scope of the problem and encourage hotels, motels, and other buildings that use MLTS to ensure that direct 9-1-1 calling worked. It said its inquiry showed that "virtually every MLTS system in use today can be configured or re-configured to allow direct 911 dialing. . .and that modifying existing systems costs little to no money. . . .The biggest obstacle to solving the problem was a lack of awareness. . . ." According to the FCC, progress on fixing the problem has been substantial.

Simply by raising awareness, we are now on track to have solved this problem by the end of the year at 24 major hotel chains nationwide, from Radisson to the Ritz-Carlton. That's real improvement that keeps people safer. . . .Manufacturers and vendors of MLTS have also stepped up to the plate. Today, half of surveyed vendors ship all of their MLTS products with a default setting of direct 911 dialing, and all of them recommend that their products be set up to allow for direct 911 dialing (see FCC June 30, 2015 statement here: [http://transition.fcc.gov/Daily\\_Releases/Daily\\_Business/2015/db0630/DOC-334168A1.pdf](http://transition.fcc.gov/Daily_Releases/Daily_Business/2015/db0630/DOC-334168A1.pdf)).

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