

Proposal for PSAP Training Fund

Submitted by Major City Police Chiefs Organization – April 2005

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1. Background

The Major City Chiefs 911 Report focused on the critical need to train dispatchers to the level needed to perform their complex and varied job functions. Developing 911 dispatcher ability to give lifesaving instructions to callers with a choking child, to gather critical information from a victim of domestic violence, to skillfully handle a suicidal caller, to understand how to deal with a mentally unstable caller, to properly assess the danger of a hazardous materials leak, to manage cover and radio assignments during a multiple alarm fire, or to assure scene safety at a bank robbery are just a few examples of critical skills that PSAPs need to develop among their 911 dispatcher staff.

Unfortunately, organized training of dispatchers is minimal or even non-existent in many PSAPs throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Some dispatchers have reported no training in years, outside the periodic “at-console training” that attends many procedure or new equipment installs in the PSAP. Many PSAPs provide no training outside the PSAP walls and have no ability to relieve dispatchers to attend training; many others provide less than 8 hours each year of in-service training.

Few PSAPs have formal pre-service training requirements beyond the 16-hours required by the state in the operation of 911 telephone and TDD equipment. Very few have formal OJT programs where 911 dispatchers are required to develop all required knowledge, skills, and abilities in a structured, certified environment.

Why is this the case?

- a. There is no legislation requiring dispatcher training and there are almost no training standards for dispatchers. Only 16 hours of

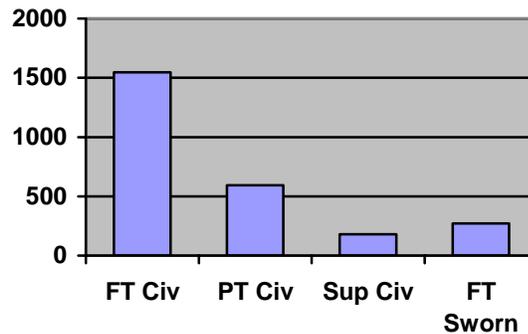
training (largely in the operation of the 911 phone and its related TTD device) are required by rule of the SETB.

- b. Dispatchers cannot easily be spared for training because to send a dispatcher to training requires that a relief dispatcher be hired on overtime to fill-behind the dispatcher-at-training. Cities and towns simply cannot afford backfill.
- c. In some PSAPs, turnover is so high that employers are reluctant to invest in training of short-term employees.
- d. There are relatively few opportunities for dispatcher training, especially quality ones or part-time opportunities. The state intends to re-start the highly regarded 5-week Dispatch Academy in May after a hiatus of 1 year. However, only a small fraction of PSAPs are able to spare new staff for the intense 5-week curriculum.
- e. The small amount of time that dispatchers can be spared for training, if they can be spared at all, often gets subsumed by meeting the SETB equipment training requirements. Thus in 2005 and 2006, all persons answering 911 phones are being required to attend a 16-hour course taught by SETB staff at a regional training facility.

In 2003, a survey was undertaken by the Mass Communications Supervisors Association (MCSA) to determine the number of dispatchers in the state. The study found approximately 1574 persons in the state who work full-time as non-sworn 911 dispatchers, 593 who work part-time as non-sworn 911 dispatchers, 179 non-sworn 911 Dispatch Supervisors (virtually all of whom work as line 911 dispatchers either on a frequent or occasional basis), 272 sworn police officers or firefighters who work full-time as 911 Dispatchers, and a large number (over 2,000) of additional sworn personnel who fill-in as 911 Dispatchers on an occasional or part-time basis.

None of these individuals, except sworn police officers who must take 40-hours of in-service training each year and firefighters that receive varying amounts of fireground skills training, are required to engage in any in-service training of any kind.

Number of Dispatchers in MA (2003)



2. **Solutions to the Training Problem**

The Major City Chiefs 911 Committee looked at training to dispatchers provided in other states, at the status of training offered to dispatchers in New England, and at their own local training efforts. The following were recommended:

A. **Establish Pre-service Training Standards**

Provide training to each newly hired dispatcher sufficient to perform their job at a high level of competence. In particular, it is recommended that dispatchers, within the first year of employ, receive training equivalent to the following:

1. Pre-Service Training at or equal to the training offered at the 5 week Dispatch Academy (coordinated by the SETB).
2. State and national certification in – or equal to - most or all of the following, depending on specific job duties: APCO Basic Telecommunications, Mass. 911 Call Taking, TTY, Basic Police Dispatch, Basic Fire Dispatch, EMD, CJIS and CPR.
3. Structured OJT following Pre-Service or initial training as described above in department policies, CAD system operations, and other topics required to achieve proficiency as a Dispatcher or Telecommunicator. The APCO CTO program is recommended for the standard for the structure and extent of the OJT Program in PSAPs.

B. **Establish Yearly In-Service Training Standards**

Provide Yearly In-Service base-line training equal to or exceeding 16 hours each year in topics designed to develop skills needed for career development and meeting the needs of host departments. For comparison, the Municipal Police Training Committee is said to have a yearly in-

service standard of 32 hours of classroom training for police officers and 8 hours of firearms training.

Yearly in-service training can be accomplished by attending state or vendor sponsored training courses taught regionally; by attending in-house training conducted by local police agencies; or by attending shared training given by one police agency for other agencies in the local area.

Some cities have had success with scheduling in-service dispatcher training in 4-hour blocks, opening it up to surrounding cities and towns, and scheduling it to repeat over several different night and day periods so that it is made convenient to the round-the-clock schedules of dispatchers.

C. Create Two PSAP Training Funds as line items in both the Wireline and Wireless 911 Programs, beginning in FY06.

The Funds would provide targeted yearly grants to PSAPs to insure that training needs are met according to state and local standards.

There would be two programs: a Yearly Formula PSAP Training Grant Program and a Yearly Discretionary PSAP Training Grant Program.

The SETB would administer both grant programs and establish rules for their use and for any audit procedures.

1. Yearly Formula PSAP Training Grant Program

Direct Funding of PSAPs for 911 Training

Each year PSAPs would receive direct funds, proportionate to their needs, to provide training and career development to 911 Dispatchers.

The funds would be disbursed by the SETB according to a formula that includes the following four factors: Census Population of the PSAP area as a proportion of the state's population, Crime Rate of the PSAP area as a proportion of the state's crime rate, Fire Incidents occurring in the PSAP area as a proportion of the state's total fire incidents; and Number of 911 Calls Received as a proportion of the state's total 911 calls.

One purpose of the formula is to insure that PSAPs know the general amount of funds to anticipate in a coming year, so that training plans may be made and schedules developed.

Another purpose of the formula is to provide funding proportionate to need. Determining need arises from a fair and comprehensive assessment of the demands made on a community by the 911 system. The 4-part formula above reflects the key major objective criteria that indicate demands on the PSAP. Using all four criteria is a more balanced way to approach a formula than using any one criteria by itself. For example:

- a. Using 911 Call volume by itself may penalize PSAPs and communities that do a good job using 911 only for emergency reasons.
- b. Using Census population by itself may penalize PSAPs and communities that, for example, have a seasonal population or a large daytime business population.
- c. Using the number of dispatchers as a criteria for the formula is problematic in a state where there are wide variations in the use of sworn officers to answer 911 calls and perform 911 dispatch functions on a part-time or fill-in basis.
- d. The use of Crime rate and fire incidence helps those communities where the complex, added impact of serious emergencies on the 911 function is proportionately greatest.

Use of Grant Funds

The PSAP Formula grants would be made yearly and would be used for 911 Training and related 911 staff development purposes as established in SETB regulations.

The funds would cover training class registration and fees for approved training classes, training materials and educational supplies, 911 call simulators, CTO training costs, instructor fees, continuing education and recertification in 911 dispatcher skill areas, 911 workshops and conferences, overtime for trainees, overtime for backfill of trainees, online 911 training, basic supervisory skills training, etc.

PSAP use of training funds would be subject to audit.

Size of Formula Grant Program

The yearly formula grant program should be no less than 5.0% of the projected yearly funds to be remitted by the 911 funds. Each PSAP would be guaranteed to receive funds each year.

2. Yearly Discretionary PSAP Training Grant Program

A smaller companion PSAP Discretionary fund would provide funds awarded through a merit review process to meet special needs caused by new or changed state or federal regulations, by the consolidation of PSAPs, by the agreement of regional consortiums of PSAPs to conduct joint training locally, or by special requests from PSAPs that are innovative or especially meritorious.

The Discretionary Program would be not less than 10% the size of the Yearly Formula Program and would be funded by an additional line item in the 911 funds.

The SETB would administer the funds according to established rules.

D. Amend the Wireline and Wireless statutes to insure that training 911 Dispatcher Training becomes a broadbased priority.

1. Wireline Fund

In the case of the E911 wireline fund, Massachusetts has done an excellent job of creating a state-of-the-art 911 phone system and providing a funding resource to insure 911-program cost-recovery by telecommunications carriers. It is time that the 911 functions of PSAPs were more directly included in the cost-recovery provisions of the statute.

911 involves is far more than a telephone system or a cost-recovery mechanism by a particular telephony vendor, it is a critical, universal, and fundamental service by local government to its citizens in their time of greatest need. The knowledge, skills, and abilities of 911 dispatchers are critical to the provision of 911 services and should be treated as such in the statutes.

2. **Wireless Fund**

The wireless 911 fund provides various mechanisms for the funding of 911 dispatcher training but the specific language of the statute should be enhanced to broadly and forcefully emphasize 911 Dispatcher Training as a specific priority.