

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

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To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Sequanna Taylor, Intergovernmental Relations Chair

From: Cassandra Libal, Director of the Office of Emergency Management

Subject: 2019 Wisconsin Act 26 and Public Safety Answering Points Update

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REQUEST

This report outlines Milwaukee County's journey towards embracing the ESINet system and navigating the Act 26 Primary PSAP Grant. The county's commitment to enhanced emergency response capabilities and collaboration remains steadfast as it adapts to the changing landscape of 911 services.

POLICY

Since its inception, the 911 systems across the nation have relied on copper phone lines to connect citizens to critical emergency resources. However, a significant change is on the horizon. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is set to mandate the transition from copper technology to fiber optic technology through the ESINet (Emergency Services IP Network) system. This transformative program aims to route all 911 calls through data centers across the United States, ensuring direct connections to primary Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) using hyper-accurate Geographic Information System (GIS) data. Milwaukee County, in response to these developments, has taken steps to align with ESINet guidelines and secure the Act 26 Primary PSAP Grant for an effective transition.

BACKGROUND

ESINet Transition and Act 26 Grant:

ESINet represents a paradigm shift in 911 services, demanding the adoption of fiber optic technology for seamless and precise communication between emergency responders and citizens. To facilitate this transition, the State of Wisconsin introduced the Act 26 Primary PSAP Grant, intended to support consolidation, infrastructure upgrade, and alignment with ESINet standards. Counties were tasked with designating a primary PSAP designee to receive state funding for enhancing their 911 systems. This funding would facilitate collaborations, acquisition of essential technologies, and bolstering Emergency Medical Dispatcher and Land Information Office support.

Milwaukee County's Involvement:

Milwaukee County recognized the importance of embracing ESINet principles and securing the Act 26 grant. To this end, the county embarked on a comprehensive process to select a primary PSAP designee aligned with ESINet requirements. The Act 26 guidelines emphasized that primary designation does not necessarily equate to being the actual primary PSAP. Instead, it ensures state funding allocation to one of the 11 designated centers within Milwaukee County.

ICC's Role in Designation:

The task of designating a PSAP within Milwaukee County fell under the purview of the ICC (Intergovernmental Cooperation Council). In the 2022 grant cycle, the ICC faced challenges in designating a center, leading to Milwaukee County missing out on funding. In response, the ICC established an Act 26 Sub-Committee comprising representatives from various sectors, including police, fire, IT, and county governance.

Sub-Committee Deliberation and Decision:

The Act 26 Sub-Committee embarked on an extensive process throughout the winter and spring of 2023. It developed a framework for assessing a primary PSAP designee that would be eligible for the grant. Information was solicited from three existing centers within the county—Bayside Communications, the City of Milwaukee, and Milwaukee County itself. These centers were evaluated based on their capacity, ability to support a countywide 911 system, and potential projects eligible for grant funding.

Selection of PSAP Designee:

After a thorough evaluation, the Sub-Committee presented its findings during the June ICC meeting. Despite exhaustive deliberations, a consensus for recommending a specific designee could not be reached. Consequently, OEM (Office of Emergency Management) staff engaged with mayors and village presidents in June and July to provide insights and garner support for Milwaukee County's PSAP candidacy.

During the July ICC meeting, a vote was taken to designate a PSAP in time to meet the 2023 Act 26 deadline of August 1st. Bayside Communications emerged as the designated PSAP through a majority vote.

FISCAL EFFECT

While the fiscal impact on Milwaukee County's OEM operations may not be immediately detrimental, the county will miss out on state funding for functions that it already performs for the community. Instead, the onus of funding future service expansions and alignment efforts with other municipalities will fall on those collaborative partners. OEM remains committed to seeking alternative funding sources to sustain its pursuit of service consolidation and collaboration within the 911 Dispatch Center.

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