

# 911 FUNDING

## Is Top Priority for Kentucky Cities

by Tyler Campbell, Governmental Affairs Communications Manager

At the core of every local government is the responsibility to provide public safety and emergency services. Most people would find it hard to disagree with that assertion. Yet despite public safety and emergency services being the foundation of local government, funding 911 emergency services has become increasingly difficult. The decline in popularity of landline telephones has left many local governments with decreasing revenues to support ever-more expensive 911 services.

**911 services** are funded primarily through landline and wireless user fees. Kentuckians are phasing out landline use, and funding is suffering. According to the latest annual report from the Commercial Mobile Radio Services (CMRS), local governments are now filling this funding gap, providing more than 40 percent of funding for 911 services from local general funds. Funding 911 emergency services through local general funds has led to increased strain on city and county budgets throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

In an effort to address the increasing shortfall of 911 funding, the Kentucky League of Cities, the Kentucky Association of Counties, the local Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) and several other emergency responder organizations supported 911 funding legislation during the 2014 legislative session that would have increased statewide funding for 911 emergency services.

Unfortunately, increasing fees, even user fees, during an election year proved to be a difficult task. The 911 funding bill did not move during the 2014 legislative session. However, KLC and its coalition of supporters are bringing the issue back before the Kentucky General Assembly in 2015. The Kentucky League of Cities Board of Directors voted the 911 funding shortfall as its top priority heading into the 2015 legislative session. KLC will continue to approach the members of the Kentucky General Assembly about the true funding needs of 911 emergency services.

KLC will continue to push for 911 funding legislation that:

- Increases the current CMRS wireless fee to a reasonable level for funding local 911 emergency services. If the Kentucky General Assembly continues to abdicate its duties to adequately fund 911 emergency services by raising the statewide wireless fee, KLC will support legislation that allows local governments to assess their own local 911 wireless user fee similar to the fees assessed for local landlines.
- Addresses the disparity between prepaid and postpaid wireless subscribers by requiring all wireless subscribers to pay the equivalent of the statewide CMRS wireless fee.
- Repeals the cost-recovery statutes that send taxpayer money to wireless providers for previous investments in wireless 911 technology. A number of states have done away with these statutes, as



technology investments for enhanced 911 have already been made. This would free up more than \$4 million annually to assist local PSAPs in funding 911 emergency services.

- Opposes any measure removing the ability of local governments to impose local fees for the operation of 911 emergency services or any proposal that would reduce the total amount of state-generated revenue from the statewide wireless fee, as it would result in less funding coming back to local governments and their PSAPs.

Mandates from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) are just around the corner. Soon the FCC will mandate text-to-911 and other Next Generation 911 technology. It is a question of when, not if, this mandate comes from the federal government. Kentucky must be prepared for the cost and new infrastructure needed to implement this mandate from the federal government. If we continue on the current course of underfunding local 911 operations, Kentucky will be behind as soon as the "starting gates" open. The time to address this issue is sooner rather than later, and KLC looks forward to working with our county counterparts, local PSAPs, first responders and members of the wireless communications industry on this issue during the 2015 legislative session. The support of our local and state officials is critical to ensuring that 911 emergency services are adequately funded to protect the citizens of the commonwealth. **KYC**