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September 26, 2023

File: 0400-20

Honourable Mike Farnworth  
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General  
PO Box 9010, Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2  
Via email: [PSSG.Minister@gov.bc.ca](mailto:PSSG.Minister@gov.bc.ca)

Dear Minister Farnworth:

**RE: CALL ANSWER LEVY ON CELL PHONE DEVICES**

At the September 13, 2023, Capital Regional District (CRD) Board meeting a motion was passed to request the implementation of a call answer levy on cell phone devices, and that the revenue be made available to the CRD to fund the Capital Region Emergency Service Telecommunications (CREST) service.

911 call answer services are an integral part of the Province's emergency communication system. There are eight 911 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) which operate under local government authority, with a patchwork of different service providers that provide 911 services to most of the province. Local governments voluntarily contract with the RCMP Provincial Police Service, deliver the service through E-Comm (Emergency Communications for BC, Inc), or provide the 911 service themselves.

The issue of funding for emergency 911 call answer services has been a long-standing challenge for local government authorities having jurisdictional responsibility for delivery of these critical services for their respective communities. Originally, local authorities received call answer levy (CAL funds) from the telecom companies that recovered a 911 fee from phone bills from their landline customers. These CAL funds significantly offset the financial burden on local governments responsible for delivering the 911 call answer services. The CAL funds collected by telecom companies does not apply to cellular phone connections.

With the proliferation of cellular phone use and the corresponding decrease in the use of landlines by the general population, there has been a significant decline in the amount of CAL funds that flow to local authorities while at the same time the costs of maintaining 911 call answer service delivery have increased considerably. The introduction and move to next generation 911 (NG911) mandated by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), while a welcomed advancement in public safety communications, has further exacerbated the financial burden on local authorities as the PSAPs operations gear up with staff and equipment to meet the regulatory obligations associated with the transition to NG911 compliance.

In the past and again this year, the Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) endorsed a number of resolutions calling for the Province to introduce legislation that would allow the implementation of a province-wide 911 CAL on wireless devices. In July 2013, UBCM released a report on the issue and requested that local governments provide further input on the provincial call answer levy issue. In May 2014, UBCM advised there was not sufficient support for the CAL among local governments.

In March 2015, the BC Ministry of Justice released a strategic vision discussion paper, Emergency Communications Service Delivery in British Columbia, Emergency Communications Service Delivery in BC - Police Communication Centres and 911 PSAP - Strategic Vision Discussion Paper (gov.bc.ca) which highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by local authorities to continue delivering 911 services with rising costs and decreasing CAL. The document specifically states "Although UBCM withdrew the proposal, the Ministry considers there is still merit in considering a CAL on wireless devices".

In 2019, a provincial level 911 Services Steering Committee was established by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General as a forum for information sharing amongst the members related to the Ministry's activities and to provide timely advice directly to the Ministry on matters related to emergency communications which included 911 service delivery, 911 technology such as 911 next generation implementation and funding and resources. This committee dissipated without any resolution arising from the efforts.

As we get closer to the final implementation stages of the NG911 rollout in an environment of increasingly serious fiscal challenges, the CRD Board is requesting that the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General implement a call answer levy on all cell phone devices and that the revenue be made available to local authorities responsible for the delivery of 911 call answer services.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Colin Plant  
Chair, Capital Regional District Board

cc: CRD Board  
Ted Robbins, Chief Administrative Officer, CRD  
Kevin Lorette, General Manager, Planning and Protective Services, CRD