



HEALTH CARE COALITION  
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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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# 911 Town Hall Meeting Discloses Funding Issues, Challenges and Potential Solutions

## COMMUNITY ASKED TO RALLY LEGISLATORS TO ADVOCATE FOR PHASE 2 WIRELESS

A well-attended town hall meeting at the Margaret Gray Center in Lexington detailed 911 funding challenges as well as encouraged area residents to get involved. The event, hosted by The Health Care Coalition of Lafayette County, included a presentation by Lafayette County's 911 Director Mark Allen.

### Current Challenges

He explained that 911 is funded in part by a 15% tax that is found on local area network (LAN) line phone bills to support base services. The problem is that home phone service has decreased by 19% according to state averages. What this means to Lafayette County is a deficit in the County's budget to fund the current 911 system—a deficit of more than \$156,000 that is extracted from funds set aside for roads, bridges and other improvement needs.

"This loss in revenue hurts," Allen said. "When 911 started in 1996, we had to purchase equipment, set-up dispatch centers and hire and train employees. These base services were funded by a 15% tariff. At that time, there was no way to know the impact that cell phones would have and that home phone service would realize a steady decline."

According to Allen, approximately 65% of 911 calls are made from cell phones. Unlike LAN lines, wireless 911 calls made in Lafayette County will not provide automatic name/number identification (ANI) or automatic location identification (ALI). In these

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instances, the dispatch centers can only make an approximation of where the caller is based on where the call terminated. However, this approximation can be skewed by a 20 mile radius. In an emergency situation, that could prove fatal.

“Many of our residents believe that if I dial 911 from my cell phone, you should know who I am and where to come to get me—that’s just not the case,” he said.

Another challenge for 911 wireless calls is that some callers may not be able to articulate where they are or what the emergency is. Other cell phone callers may be able to articulate, but don’t know where they are which was the case in an actual 911 call that Allen played back. The caller, a child, could articulate but didn’t know where she was and was asked to call back once she found out.

### **Phase 2 Wireless 911 and Associated Costs With Next Generation 911**

Allen, along with the HCC, is advocating for Phase Two Wireless 911. This enables the same ANI/ALI information that is provided to home and business phone lines provided through local carriers. However, as much as Phase Two would be a welcome addition to Lafayette County, the current system will ultimately be phased out by what Allen calls next generation 911.

Proposed costs include:

- 911 Equipment, \$150,000
- Computer enhancements and upgrades, \$50,000
- 911 mapping, \$65,000
- 911 recorder, \$35,000

Total costs will run about \$300,000, coupled with covering the \$156,000 plus deficit the department faces annually. Allen stressed the importance for residents to voice their concerns to their elected officials.

“I don’t want to advocate that this is Sen. Bill Stouffer’s or Rep. Joe Aull’s fault,” he said. Pushing this though will require another tax during a very tough time. On the other hand, look at the lives it will save.”

Aull added that there are many things they would like to do, but it’s a tough time to get anything done.

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“I can’t speak for the entire legislature, but we are very sympathetic and realize that something has to be done,” Aull said. “We are not turning a deaf ear to this.” Missouri is the only state in the Union that doesn’t have phase two wireless.

### **Legislation and taxes**

Heidi Kolkmeier, Sen. Stouffer’s assistant, said due to the Hancock Amendment, passing a new tax would require the bill to go before Lafayette County residents – a bill that has come twice before county residents and failed twice.

Allen admitted that the ball was dropped when it came to hitting the pavement and explaining how the tax would benefit the county

Area resident Iva Eggert asked where the 911 tax goes that already appears on her cell phone bill because as it stands now not a dime goes to Lafayette County.

“They take that money and fund 911 in other states,” Allen explained. “Cell phone companies have to comply with federal regulations, but Lafayette County doesn’t get any benefit from the \$1.21 911 cell phone taxes.”

Allen added if the legislature passes funding, perhaps a \$0.25 to a \$0.75 tax increase on cell phones, the taxes would help to generate anywhere from \$79,883.71 to \$200,000 annually, to help fund phase two and/or next generation 911 in the county. The HCC is currently working with the county to find grant funding.

### **New technology poses even more challenges...**

Voice-over Internet Protocol (VOIP) is trumping DSL making it the latest, antiquated technology much like analog TV. VOIP acts as a digital phone enabling end-users to leverage their computers as telephones. It’s also offered at a cheaper price than traditional LAN lines because 911 taxes are not required. This technology poses the same 911 issues as cell phone calls in areas without phase two wireless, and even more decreases in tax-generated revenue.

Next generation wireless will also require a 911 text messaging component as will video messaging. These technological advances may pose even more funding dilemmas in the future. As for now, Lafayette County residents are asked to roll up their sleeves and advocate for 911 wireless—a move that will take approximately two years to get up and running.

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**Initial action plan:**

1. Residents are asked to get the facts about issues facing 911 wireless and share this information with friends and family as well as faith-based, social and civic groups.
2. Request Mark Allen as a speaker at upcoming events or group meetings to learn more about 911 wireless in Lafayette County.
3. Contact local legislators to voice concerns.
4. Testify at statewide hearings about how lack of funding for 911 wireless is affecting the county.

“It’s going to take pressure from the bottom up. This is a vital concern for the people who voted legislators into office,” Allen said noting the 2007 case of Kelsey Smith who died tragically after attempting to alert police of her location but ultimately traveled to an area where there was no phase two wireless. Another tragedy mentioned was the homicide that took place not long ago at the BP in Odessa that sent police to a Lexington BP.

“This is why I am so adamant about this...We are talking about every man, woman and child—the people we love.” Allen said.

For more information, contact Mark Allen at 660.259.2796, or Toniann Richard, executive director for the HCC, at 660.259.9019, [www.HCCNetwork.org](http://www.HCCNetwork.org).

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