



911 Service in Pennsylvania

An Overview

Updated: **June 2025**



Pennsylvania
Emergency Management Agency

in partnership with



Overview of Pennsylvania's 911 System

The ability to quickly access 911 is a vital part of the public safety system. It is the **critical link** between people who **need** help and the people who are **trained** to help.

In Pennsylvania, the heart of our 911 system is comprised of county-based call centers (referred to as Public Safety Answering Points, or PSAPs) and their highly trained staff of telecommunicators. The delivery of 911 services requires a combination of personnel, facilities, and complex systems and technologies to be available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to ensure that both the public and field responders receive the level of service that is expected and required in emergency situations.

Pennsylvania PSAPs process **more than 14 million** requests for service each year.

Each day, Pennsylvania's telecommunicators work around the clock to keep us safe and are responsible for performing multiple tasks, such as providing life-saving instructions to callers, coordinating resources for an incident response, and ensuring the safety of first responders in the field.



911: Pennsylvania's **FIRST** first responders

*“Years ago, I found my mother unconscious after her sugar levels dropped. I dialed 911, told them what was going on, and they dispatched emergency personnel. **The only reason I didn't lose it was because they stayed on the line with me.** I would have been no help to the EMS crew when they arrived had the 911 operator not talked to me until that time.”*

Roles and Responsibilities:

Chapter 53 of Title 35 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes outlines the powers and duties for the key stakeholders in Pennsylvania's 911 system:

- **Counties** are responsible for providing 911 within their jurisdiction by either operating a PSAP or by participating in a regional partnership. Two examples of regional partnerships would be **Cameron County** contracting with **Elk County** for 911 service or **Snyder and Union Counties** forming the *Central Susquehanna Regional 911 PSAP*.
- **PEMA** supports counties with activities related to funding, planning, coordination, and oversight, administers the statewide Next Generation 911 service contract, and leads cost savings efforts through statewide procurement activities.
- The **911 Advisory Board** advises PEMA on the administration of Pennsylvania 911 systems. The Board has representation from the General Assembly, Counties, State Agencies, and a variety of public safety, industry, and government associations.



911 System Funding in Pennsylvania

The 911 fee authorized by Act 12 of 2015 is the primary funding source for the critical 911 systems and personnel that provide life-saving services every day in Pennsylvania. 911 surcharge revenue has been relatively stable since 2016.

Between 2016 and 2023:

- 911 fee collections have **averaged \$320 million** annually
- 911 fee collections have **increased by only 4%** during this timeframe
- Consistent revenue levels have provided budget certainty

However, the amounts collected have not kept pace with the rising costs associated with providing 911 service. To address this gap, the General Assembly passed Act 34 in December 2023 which increased the uniform monthly 911 fee from \$1.65 to \$1.95 effective through January 31, 2026.

911 system costs not covered by the 911 fee are typically funded by county property tax dollars or other local revenue sources. As technologies continue to evolve and funding streams no longer align with current realities, counties need to be able to rely on consistent and sustainable funding to maintain their responsibility as the first line of emergency response.

A recent Federal Communications Commission retail telephone service report revealed that between 2023 and 2024 **VoIP and landline subscriptions in Pennsylvania declined 7% and 15% (respectively)** while **wireless subscriptions experienced a minimal 2% growth** in that same period. This reported decline in telecommunications subscriptions, combined with wireless market saturation, serves as an indicator that **our current 911 surcharge collection lags the steady rise of 911 system expenditures.**

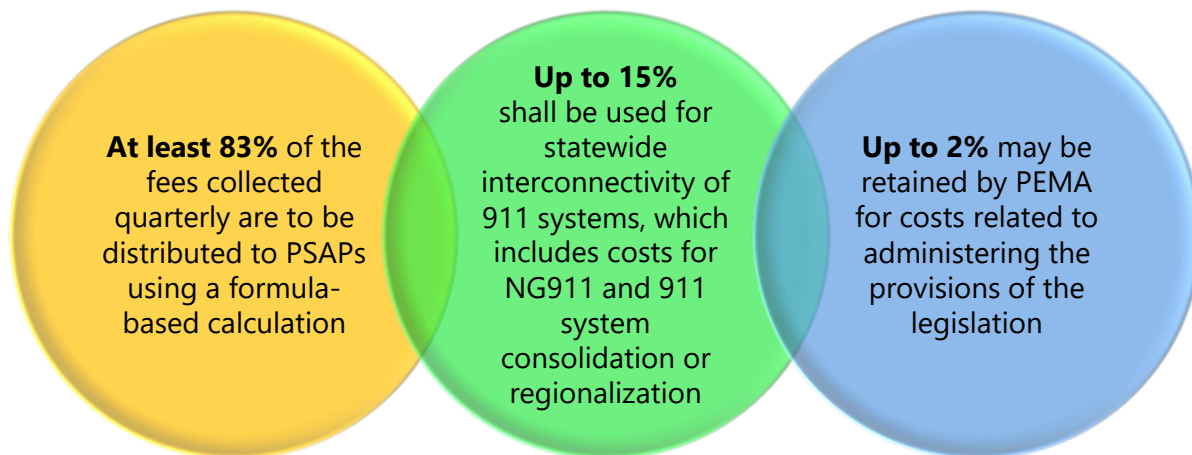
[FCC Voice Telephone Services Report, May 2025](#)

Reauthorization of the 911 fee prior to its January 2026 sunset date is critical to ensuring the reliability of Pennsylvania's 911 system and its dedicated personnel.



911 Fee Distribution:

The distribution of 911 fees as required by Chapter 53 is outlined below. Revenue distribution percentages may vary annually based on 911 system needs and obligations.



911 System Expenditures:

In the U.S., each state establishes eligibility rules for 911 fee expenditures based on its individual needs and circumstances. Pennsylvania's eligibility rules support activities related to 911 call delivery, processing, and dispatch – all of which align with the Federal Communications Commission's rules for acceptable uses of 911 fees.

Pennsylvania's 911 System Costs in 2023:

- The cost to provide 911 service in Pennsylvania was **\$445.1 million**
- The **911 fee covered 74%** of 911 system costs
- **Counties contributed \$106 million** toward 911 service in 2023

911 Fee Administration and Oversight:

Pennsylvania has taken considerable actions to ensure 911 fees are used for 911 service:




- PA law prohibits the use of 911 fees for non-911 purposes
- Eligible uses of 911 fees have been defined for PA and align with FCC rules
- Strong financial reporting requirements have been established for PA PSAPs
- PEMA reviews all costs funded by 911 fees to verify compliance with eligibility rules
- Each county's use of 911 fees is audited by a third-party auditor, as required by law
- Detailed financial info is provided annually to the General Assembly and the public



911 System Improvements, Efficiencies, and Future Technologies:

Between 2005 and 2015, 911 system costs increased, on average, by 6% per year. The annual rate of **expenditure growth was reduced to 4% between 2016 and 2023** as Pennsylvania 911 systems progressed from a county focus (prior to Act 12) to the regional focus we have today. Pennsylvania's 911 system stakeholders continue their work to implement strategies for managing costs while making targeted investments in system improvements, system regionalization and consolidation, and future technologies such as Next Generation 911. Here are some examples:

By participating in shared systems projects, **14 southwestern PA counties** are **saving \$1.2 million** in annual operating costs and **have avoided \$11.3 million** in non-recurring costs.

-  **4 PSAP consolidations** have occurred since 2016
-  **54 PSAPs participate in a shared system** to find cost/operational efficiencies
-  The annual cost for NG911 call delivery is **fixed and level through 2030 for all PSAPs**

Future Challenges and Opportunities:

While Pennsylvania has taken notable measures to control expenses, **our 911 system costs grew by \$116 million (or 35%)** between 2016 and 2023. For comparison, the nationwide cost for 911 service increased by \$2.4 billion (or 68%) over that same period. 911 system costs are anticipated to increase in the following areas:

- **Personnel:** PSAPs in Pennsylvania and across the country are still navigating a staffing crisis and must continue to invest more in telecommunicator recruitment and retention.
- **Technology/Operations:** Critical systems must be maintained for 24x7 operations.
- **Next Generation 911:** NG911 will continue to introduce new costs in areas such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), training, cybersecurity, and connectivity while preparing PSAPs for FCC Phase 2 readiness, and updating applications to support data, multimedia, and the potential for artificial intelligence (AI) assistive technologies.
- **Ancillary Services:** Pennsylvania will have opportunities to leverage the Emergency Services IP Network (ESInet) for shared systems, public safety applications, and other regionalization efforts.
- **Internet of Things (IoT):** NG911 standards permit the growing network of devices and applications capable of transmitting data and multimedia (the IoT) to send emergency notifications and associated 911 call data to PSAPs. The National Emergency Number Association (NENA) anticipates that these devices will generate a high volume of alerts and data updates resulting in increased 911 call volume and PSAP workload. The public's adoption of things such as in-home alarm sensors, wearable medical devices, and connected vehicles and buildings requires 911 stakeholders to identify the costs associated with supporting IoT technologies and establish a framework on which to assess a 911 surcharge.




Comparison of 911 Systems Among States

States have established legislation, funding structures, eligibility rules, and financial reporting requirements for 911 to suit their respective circumstances – with limited federal guidance. As a result, a standard comparison among state 911 systems is difficult to achieve.

Number of PSAPs: Pennsylvania has a consolidated 911 system compared to states of similar size. **We are one of only 13 states** that operates fewer primary PSAPs than there are counties. Pennsylvania’s consolidated approach toward the number of PSAPs allows for the provision of 911 in an **efficient and cost-effective manner** without sacrificing the quality of 911 services for our citizens.


State	2023 Population	PSAPs
Florida	22,610,726	140
New York	19,571,216	134
Pennsylvania	12,961,683	61
Illinois	12,549,689	176
Ohio	11,785,935	144
Georgia	11,029,227	155

Expense Eligibility Rules: Each state generally incurs the same types of costs related to call delivery, call processing, and dispatch functions to provide 911 service – but the eligibility rules and the method for funding these 911 costs will differ by state.




Pennsylvania’s relatively small number of PSAPs has allowed us to establish more-inclusive eligibility rules that allow a broader spectrum of 911 costs to be funded by the 911 fee, while **limiting the burden on local taxpayers** as much as possible.

Financial Reporting Requirements: The Federal Communications Commission’s annual 911 Fee Reports document is a primary source of information about state 911 systems. Some limitations of the FCC reports are that financial reporting requirements and capabilities vary by state, or they may only report costs that are funded by a 911 fee.



In contrast, **Pennsylvania has comprehensive financial reporting requirements** that require PSAPs to report all costs for 911 in a standardized manner, regardless of funding source. As a result, our costs will appear higher than many other states.

Variety of 911 Fees: Factors such as population, the number of PSAPs, eligibility rules, legislation, costs, and others may impact a state’s 911 fee rate. Act 12 of 2015 authorized a monthly 911 fee in Pennsylvania, which is currently at \$1.95. Below are some notable differences in state 911 fees, as of 2023:

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- **6 states** allow a 911 fee rate higher than \$1.95
 - **16 states** have established percentage-based fees on prepaid wireless service
 - **4 states** have established a percentage-based fee on other service types



Impact of Supportive 911 Legislation

PEMA, our county partners, the 911 Advisory Board, and other 911 system stakeholders have built a collaborative relationship because of Act 12 and continue to implement many 911 system enhancements. Pennsylvania has many notable 911 accomplishments at the state, regional, and county levels. Together, we are prepared to usher the commonwealth into a new emergency communications era with the continued support of the General Assembly.

Statewide 911 Plan. The Pennsylvania 911 community completed many of the action steps outlined in the previous version of the Statewide 911 Plan. In December 2023, a new Statewide 911 Plan was adopted to build on the successes in recent years and address the changing needs of the public and PSAPs in a coordinated, sustainable manner.

Next Generation 911 in Pennsylvania. The initial phase of the NG911 project focused on modernizing the infrastructure that delivers 911 calls to our PSAPs. We reached a significant milestone in April 2025 when the last NG911 migration was completed and all of Pennsylvania's PSAPs were digitally connected for the first time in history. These improvements are the foundation on which PSAPs can better accommodate callers' access to 911 through both legacy and modern technologies, devices, and protocols.

Statewide 911 Management Information System (MIS). A product of the NG911 upgrade project, the MIS dashboard provides each PSAP with near real-time information about the operational status and conditions of the NG911 system across Pennsylvania. Its data analytics allows users to perform a statistical analysis to identify trends, measure key performance indicators to support decision making and future planning and provides new reporting capabilities.

NG911 GIS Data Development. Under Act 12, counties have made tremendous progress in developing robust GIS data layers that meet the rigorous standards to support 911 call delivery with Pennsylvania's NG911 system. Today, all 67 counties are using their GIS data to support NG911 call delivery. Together the counties have uploaded and maintain more than 6.8 million GIS records to the NG911 system to support 911 call routing.

New Training and Quality Assurance Requirements. PEMA works with the Board to annually review and update minimum training and quality assurance requirements for 911 personnel. In December 2024, the minimum training requirements were updated to support telecommunicator mental health and wellness.

Effective Statewide Interconnectivity Funding Management. Allocating up to 15% of 911 fee collections for statewide interconnectivity of the 911 system was a forward-thinking provision in Act 12. These funds have been used to address aging systems within our PSAPs, support regionalization/consolidation, and fund our transition to NG911.



Developed and Deployed a New 911 System Plan Process. Our legislation requires each PSAP to maintain a 911 System Plan. The 911 System Plans will facilitate statewide planning and coordination for our NG911 system, any regional/shared efforts, and investments in system improvements and future technologies. Building off the planning process implemented in 2022, the online planning tool was refreshed to support the PSAPs in updating their 911 System Plans in 2025.

Expanded Public Education and Outreach Efforts. Now that our PSAPs have greater accessibility to today's evolving communications technologies, PEMA continues to develop materials to educate the public about the capabilities available through NG911. An advertising campaign to promote county efforts with recruitment and retention of 911 personnel generated close to 28 million impressions across multiple platforms, including social and traditional media, in its first two runs. And to assist with retention, PEMA created the "[Pennsylvania's 911 Operators](#)" webpage that allows the public to recognize and thank 911 telecommunicators for the role they provide in the emergency response system.

