

March 11, 2025

Dear Chair Lee and members of the Senate Human Services Committee,

I am here today to speak to you on House Bill 1322. My name is Sarah Miller, Public Safety Telecommunications Director and 911 Coordinator for Barnes County Dispatch and I am the President of the North Dakota 911 Association. I have been serving this industry and my community for over 15 years in various roles including Public Safety Telecommunicator, Reserve Deputy, and Emergency Medical Technician.

Today, I am in support of this bill but have deep concerns in the added amendment allowing Emergency Medical Services operations to use third-party vendors and cell phones as a communication method.

During the interim, the North Dakota 911 Association worked with the Department of Health and Human Services EMS division to remove amendments to administrative rules that would have allowed third-party vendors and cell phones as communication methods.

There are several reasons why we stand against allowing this as a primary notification method for emergency responses.

How many times in the past year do you remember losing your cell phone service because of tower issues or random unexplained outages? How many times are you traveling on interstate and cell service is in and out? How slow is your service in crowded areas such as music festivals or events like the ND State Fair? All of these factors affect how fast you receive your emergency notification.. are you willing to risk it taking minutes for a responder to know about your family member in crisis or your house burning down?

Last year while filling in on the console and the only telecommunicator working, my area had a large structure fire in a very rural community. In the middle of taking several 911 calls, I paged three surrounding fire departments twice and got no response – no third-party page or CAD notification went through. I finally paged a fourth fire department who was over 20 miles away – because I knew they carried pagers and would receive the page.

I am thankful every day I was the one working on the console that day and not one of my staff members. I was forced to make the choice between staying on the phone with my caller reporting his business on fire or disconnecting so I could personally dial 10 phone numbers in order to get the local firefighters to respond. As 911 professionals, our number one job is to send the help so when our equipment fails us, and when we can't get ahold of the help to send them it is the worst feeling you could ever imagine.

When I contacted our third-party vendor, they replied back saying the channel must have been busy, but we have sent you a replacement audio cord to replace in case that was the

issue. We are not intended to be a primary paging resource. Departments should use pagers as we are not intended to be primary for paging.

Another third-party vendor website states, "Whether you receive text or audio messages, as long as you have cellular service your message will come through."

While I understand the convenience of a third-party paging app, having your emergency response notifications depending on a public network and public connections creates unreliability and loss of control. In fact, the National Fire Protection Association has a policy directly against allowing the paging of fire departments over public networks. Additionally, there is no standard approach to implementing a third-party paging application - each responder group, public safety answering point, county, etcetera can have different applications and equipment in different places causing the PSAP to not even know if the equipment has failed or pages are going through.

My final concern with this amendment is that to our knowledge, no discussion or input on the potential consequences has been sought out from the North Dakota 911 Association or the public safety answering points. It is vital to engage all potentially affected parties when looking at changing requirements, especially when the changes would directly affect the origination point of those notifications.

My goal, along with my 911 partners across the state of North Dakota is to enhance, improve, promote, and facilitate the North Dakota Emergency 911 System. By adding in the amendments, I believe there will be unintended consequences and the creation of additional potential points of failure within the emergency response system. I urge this committee to strike the additional amendment to Section 1 stating the department shall use pagers or third-party vendors and cell phones as a communication method. I will stand for any questions at this time.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Miller". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Sarah" and last name "Miller" clearly distinguishable.

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