



Serving the People of
Josephine County

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Phone:
541-472-1911

Fax:
541-476-8527

101 N.W. "A" St.
Grants Pass, OR 97526

March 29, 2019

Paul Evans, Chair
House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness
900 Court St, NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Support of HB2449

Chair Evans, Members of the Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness,

The Josephine County 9-1-1 Agency has served the citizens, commuters, and visitors of Josephine County through the receipt and dispatch or transfer of emergency calls since 1987, and answers approximately 4,250 9-1-1 calls per month, as well as necessary follow up calls, call entry, and other tasks required to complete the link of the citizen in need to appropriate emergency services. The governing board of the Josephine County 9-1-1 Agency wishes to relay support of HB2449. This important legislation will help to ensure adequate funding for 9-1-1 operations throughout the state.

In Josephine County, 9-1-1 taxes pay for a portion of the personnel required to answer 9-1-1 calls 24 hours a day, and they pay for some of the necessary equipment and services, accounting for approximately 23% of our annual expenditures. The majority of these services are paid for through user fees from six local Fire and EMS agencies and through a strategic partnership with the City of Grants Pass for dispatching services to supplement call-taking costs. Because most of our emergency response agencies depend on levy funding, in an economically challenged area not known for approving any tax increases, we attempt to keep these user fees as low as possible and to find other creative funding sources to meet our basic needs as we recognize that funding to provide local 9-1-1 services are in direct competition with agencies' abilities to fund adequate police and fire services.

Since 2007, the first year that our call volume records are available electronically, our 9-1-1 call volume has increased by 22%. Meeting the needs of the public has required that we add both personnel and technology. The position of a 9-1-1 dispatcher has become progressively more demanding, as call-takers are required to incorporate more technology, skills, and tasks to their call routine. Personnel costs to accommodate the increased skill level have risen dramatically. Wireless calls are now between 75-80% of our call load, but the location identification technology we use is antiquated and requires that dispatchers spend more time questioning callers to determine their exact location. We have added mapping software to our

resources because this location information is essential to directing emergency responders. We have added text to 9-1-1 to meet the needs of the deaf community as well as of those callers unable to make a voice call, although the location capabilities of this system are extremely limited, and the system requires that the dispatchers utilize a separate program to receive these calls and reenter the information into our call-taking software. The call-taking equipment used in our center has improved greatly over the years, but also requires enhanced security and infrastructure.

The costs associated with these improvements has climbed sharply over the years, but the 9-1-1 tax has not been increased since 1995. While the number of devices has increased since that time, so has the population, and the difference has not kept up with the costs for this service. The funding collected by these taxes is no longer enough to cover basic system upgrades, in many cases throughout the state already past due. If additional funding is not attained, the shift in expenses to our emergency response agencies is likely to price some fire districts out of dispatching services. We are requesting your support of HB2449 to increase the 9-1-1 tax to \$1.50 and to extend the sunset of the tax. We also respectfully ask that you consider revision of the following provisions from HB2449:

- Removal of the provision that provides 2% to counties with a population less than 40,000
- Amend the amount for Oregon Emergency Management 9-1-1 Program from 4% to 2%
- Reduce the amount collected by DAS from 1% to .05%.
- Addition of language to allow interest earned on the 9-1-1 tax to be held in an account to be utilized for future system upgrades.

HB2449 ensures that we will be able to continue to serve our citizens and our visitors who rely on 9-1-1 as the primary point of contact for all emergency services, and would allow Oregon 9-1-1 centers to responsibly improve the vital services we provide.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Kristen Guenther".

Kristen Guenther, 9-1-1 Manager
Josephine County 9-1-1 Agency