

MYTH BUSTING

PENNSYLVANIA'S 911 SYSTEM

Myth 1:

The 911 surcharge is primarily for funding NG911 technology upgrades.



Fact 1:

The surcharge funds technology modernization, PSAP operations, dispatch personnel, training, maintenance, etc.

Myth 2

Other states operate successfully with lower surcharges, so PA 911 systems are overfunded.



Fact 2:

Many of the “lower-cost” states exclude personnel, call-taking operations, or ongoing PSAP costs from surcharge eligibility, instead shifting those costs to local governments or general tax revenue.

Myth 3:

Increasing the surcharge is unnecessary because costs are driven mostly by inefficiency or overinvestment in technology.



Fact 3:

911 centers are required to support text-to-911, real-time location services, GIS integration, multimedia communications, cybersecurity protections, and redundant statewide interoperability systems.

Myth 4:

Pennsylvania could maintain service levels without increasing the surcharge if counties simply absorbed costs.



Fact 4:

If surcharge revenue does not keep pace, counties must backfill with general fund dollars, meaning local taxpayers subsidize statewide emergency communications infrastructure.

Myth 5:

Pennsylvania's approach is out of step with national norms.



Fact 5:

PA has chosen to fund a fully integrated emergency response system that includes technology and operations under a single statutory surcharge model.

Bottom Line:

Many recent critiques around the 911 surcharge rests on a narrow definition of what 911 funding is supposed to cover. Pennsylvania law defines it more broadly—and intentionally so. 911 is not just a network upgrade project. It is a continuous, workforce-driven public safety system, and the surcharge is structured to sustain that reality.