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Proponent testimony for HB2690

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Chairman Fagg and Members of the Committee, thank you for your giving me the opportunity to give you some of my thoughts on HB2690, a bill that would create the 911 Board, moving the 911 Coordinating Council, what I call a quasi-state agency into a fee funded state agency by July of 2025.

In the 2011 Legislative Session, then Sen. Pat Apple and others, looked at the landscape of E911 services and saw that emerging technology and mandates from the Federal government was moving us to NG911 and that changes were needed on how this new NG911 system would be administered in Kansas. He saw that most counties had aging E911 equipment and that vendors were already making pitches to upgrade to NG911 equipment at costs that many smaller counties could not afford. That year because of his work, the 911 Coordinating Council and a new funding distribution model was passed and became law. I was appointed to serve on the new council and have had the pleasure of being reappointed by several Speakers to continue serve in that capacity. I have learned more than I ever thought I would about NG911, PSAPS, new technology and the dedicated people that make sure that when an emergency call is made someone is there to answer it.

While the new law laid out the framework, the council is really the one that engaged with some very talented individuals in the 911 field and began the process of building a statewide solution that is in many ways far ahead of any other state. As of this year, all counties, except the MARK region in JOCO, are on the statewide solution. Meaning that everyone is using the same equipment, software, and GPS maps no matter where in Kansas the PSAP is located. This has created savings and efficiencies for our counties and their citizens.

Through those years, this committee has made adjustments to the funding and other tweaks along the way to make sure that the council's mission was fulfilled. Today I am asking you to look at HB2690 as the next step in making sure that our 911 system remains strong into the future. I believe that when the council was formed, the intention was a clearinghouse of sorts, collect the money from Telecommunication companies, distribute the money to the PSAPS. What has happened, for the good, is that the council is now a quasi-state agency running a statewide enterprise. It is my belief the time has come to bring it under the purview of the state as a fee funded agency. This will create the ability to hire employees and have more oversight of state mandated fees by the Legislature. This is not a step I take lightly, I never thought I would be advocating to create an agency, but through the years, there have been conversations and I believe the time is right.

The bill, as written, will allow the council to begin the process of hiring an Executive Director on July 1, 2024. The new 911 Board (agency) will be formed on July 1, 2025, and then all funds will be required to be transferred to the state treasury by January of 2026. From that point on the board will function as a fee funded agency much like the many other small fee funded boards that we have now. The process was laid out this way in order to give plenty of time to fix unanticipated issues next session and give the council time to work with the budget director on budgetary issues.

We have tried to anticipate issues, but with any piece of legislation, there will most likely be some adjustments the need to be made. I have already begun collecting some and will probably have an amendment when you work the bill.

Thank you for your time and I stand for questions.