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# COUNTY ADVISORY BULLETIN

**CAB**

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**BULLETIN 1999-01**

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## **TRAINING AVAILABLE FOR EMERGENCY SERVICE TELECOMMUNICATORS (SENATE BILL 5)**

Senate Bill 5, sponsored by Senator Janet Howard (R-Forest Park), established a voluntary training and certification program for emergency service telecommunicators (ESTs). The bill authorized counties and other political subdivisions to send their ESTs to training courses offered by local vocational educational centers to obtain certification without charge. The costs of sending E-911 operators and dispatchers to the training courses will be paid from the state Department of Education's Emergency Service Training Fund. The fund was created by SB 5, which also appropriated a total of \$500,000 for fiscal years 1998 and 1999.

This CAB provides information on the permissive training program that can be utilized to train and certify ESTs in the areas of:

- Effective communication skills;
- Telephone techniques;
- Telecommunicator liability;
- Requirements of the "American With Disabilities Act of 1990" that pertain to ESTs;
- Handling hysterical and suicidal callers;
- Law enforcement, fire service, and emergency medical service terminology;
- Law enforcement, fire service, and emergency medical service call processing guides;
- Radio broadcast techniques;
- Disaster planning; and
- Police officer survival, and fire or emergency medical service scene safety, or both.

### **BACKGROUND**

The introduced version of SB 5 required all ESTs to successfully complete a 40-hour basic training program and meet prescribed continuing education requirements. The bill was based on a report from the Ohio Public Safety Communications Joint Task Force. The

task force was formed over five years ago to develop standards and training for emergency service providers after a number of critical E-911 calls were improperly handled around the state.

The task force was comprised of Ohio members from the Associated Public Safety Communications Officers (APCO), National Emergency Numbers Association (NENA), as well as a representative group from the public safety sector. The introduced version of SB 5 contained a \$500,000 appropriation to pay for the costs of the training. However, the appropriation would not have paid for personnel and travel costs that local governments would have incurred by sending their emergency service employees to the mandatory training. It was the issue of costs and the view of it as an unfunded mandate on local governments that essentially prompted legislators to make the training requirements in the bill permissive. The \$500,000 appropriation remained available to local governments as an incentive for them to obtain training for their emergency service employees.

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

The following question and answer facts summarize how the permissive training program works. For additional information about this program or to review the governing statutes of this program see Ohio Revised Code (ORC) sections 4742.01 to 4742.06.

### ***Q. How much does the training course cost?***

A. SB 5 authorized \$250,000 in each of fiscal years 1998 and 1999, or \$500,000, to pay tuition and material costs for the employees of emergency service providers to obtain the 40 hours of training and certification. The personnel (i.e. overtime) and travel costs associated with sending your employees to this training is not reimbursable from monies in the Department of Education's Emergency Service Training Fund.

### ***Q. What can the permissive training program provide?***

A. The program is a State Board of Education and APCO-certified, 40-hour basic training course. As stated above, the program includes training in telephone techniques; telecommunicator liability; requirements of the "American With Disabilities Act of 1990" that pertain to ESTs; handling hysterical and suicidal callers; law enforcement, fire service, and emergency medical service terminology; law enforcement, fire service, and emergency medical service call processing guides; radio broadcast techniques; disaster planning; police officer survival; and fire or emergency medical service scene safety. Upon successful completion of the 40-hour training course, the telecommunicator obtains certification. Certification can be maintained by the telecommunicator by completing 8 hours of continuing education course work every two years after the initial training certification.

### ***Q. Who is eligible for free training?***

A. All "emergency service telecommunicators" may attend the training free of charge. Emergency service telecommunicator is defined as an individual employed by an emergency service provider, whose primary responsibility is to be an operator for the receipt or processing of calls for emergency services made by telephone, radio, or other electronic means. Generally this means employees who work as E-911 operators or

dispatchers.

***Q. Where are the free training courses being held?***

A. The intent of the legislation is to offer the training courses at least eight times per year at different vocational education centers around Ohio. Check with your local vocational education center to confirm whether or not they are offering the training course. The course must be an APCO-certified course approved by the State Board of Education. If your local vocational center is not offering the certification course or you are unsure if their course is approved by the State Board of Education, you should phone Brad Carleton, Business Industrial Relations, Ohio Department of Education at (614) 466-3520 for assistance.

***Q. How can counties utilize this program to train their employees?***

A. Once you have confirmed that your vocational center of choice is offering the appropriate training program, the vocational centers can assist you in registering employees for the training. Upon successful completion of the program, the vocational center notifies the State Board. The State Board reimburses the vocational center for tuition and material costs of providing the training; sends a copy of the certification to the person who completed the training; and sends a copy of the certification to the emergency service provider by whom the person is employed. The emergency service provider should not be billed by the vocational schools.

Proprietary schools, or private career schools, may also offer a State Board-approved training/certification program for ESTs. However, the costs of such training is not free and is not payable from the Emergency Service Training Fund. The costs of attending a training program offered by a proprietary school is paid by the individual receiving the training or their emergency service provider which employs them. See ORC Sections 4742.05 and 4742.06 for additional information on training offered by proprietary schools.

***Q. Why should counties care about getting their emergency telecommunicators trained?***

A. The primary reason to utilize this program is that it can save lives and reduce liability. Well- trained ESTs help assure that critical E-911 calls, necessary to the preservation of human life and property, are properly handled. Further, illustrating that your county has certified ESTs can be legally beneficial in proving that your county has taken reasonable efforts to ensure your employees are properly trained.

Beyond potentially saving lives and reducing liability, we also encourage counties to utilize this program because it would not be surprising to see future legislation that mandates such a certification requirement for ESTs. Take the training while it is free.

***Q. How long do counties have to send their employees to such training?***

A. The \$500,000 appropriation in the Emergency Service Training Fund to pay for the training lapses at the end of fiscal year 1999 (June 30, 1999). Because the classes are just beginning to be offered by vocational education centers, there should be a considerable amount of funds that lapse. CCAO will be working to get those funds carried

over into the next biennium. However, there are no guarantees this will happen. If you are interested in the training, you should utilize the program prior to June 30, 1999.

***Q. Can counties continue to conduct their own training for emergency service employees?***

A. The bill does not require a person to be certified in order to be employed as an EST. Counties may still elect to implement their own training and standards for their ESTs. However, if you would like your employees to be certified with the Department of Education, your training program must meet the Department's standards. See ORC Section 4742.04 for more information on this matter.

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