

PS COMMITTEE #2
October 6, 2011

MEMORANDUM

October 4, 2011

TO: Public Safety Committee

FROM: Susan J. Farag, Legislative Analyst *SJF*

SUBJECT: Update: Emergency Communications Center - FY12 budget impacts

Today the Committee will receive an update on the staff reduction at the Emergency Communications Center (ECC). Those expected to brief the Committee:

Chief J. Thomas Manger, Montgomery County Police Department
Brian Melby, Director, Police Emergency Communications Center
Bill Ferretti, Deputy Director, Police Emergency Communications Center

BACKGROUND

The County Executive recommended, as part of the FY12 Police Department Operating Budget, the reduction of dispatch operators at the Emergency Communications Center (ECC) during the overnight hours of 3am to 7am. This reduction (-\$208,000) was approved by Council.

At the ECC, each of the six Police Districts has a separate radio dispatcher who handles emergency and non-emergency radio traffic on a dedicated talk group for that District. Across these six talk groups, ECC also handles primary radio traffic for four other police agencies (Rockville City, Gaithersburg City, Chevy Chase Village, and County Sheriff's Office) as well as secondary traffic/mutual aid for four additional police agencies operating in the County (State Police, MTA Police, Takoma Park Police, and Park Police). The approved FY12 operating budget reduced coverage during the overnight hours. Instead of six radio operators, there are now three on duty.

UPDATE

The Department advises that the reduction began on July 3, 2011. After conducting additional analysis of the number and nature of calls, the time period for reduced overnight

dispatch hours was changed to 4am to 8am daily. The Department advises that Radio Talk Time Data for the Consolidated Talk Groups during the reduced overnight dispatch hours are within typical afternoon ranges for individual talk groups for the First Quarter of FY12.

Council staff also asked the Department whether reduced staff during recent weather events caused any issues. The Department advised that there have been no unplanned severe weather events, major incidents, or multiple simultaneous priority incidents occurring overnight. Therefore, there has not been an opportunity to gauge the reduced staff's ability to handle such events and to analyze their impact. The Department indicates such an event is "still of great concern." The Department also advised that "there does not appear to be an impact on response times to calls, but there is not enough data to draw any definitive conclusions."

DISCUSSION ISSUES

- 1) The Department slightly changed the hours that dispatch would be reduced, starting at 4am instead of 3am. What was the reason behind this?
- 2) How does the ECC handle *foreseen* weather events or other events that could result in high call volumes? Does it increase staff for the overnight shift in preparation?
- 3) Has the staff reduction resulting in any additional overtime? If so, how much?
- 4) The ECC handles radio traffic for other police departments like the City of Rockville. Have any of these departments expressed concerns over the dispatch staff reduction?

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