



Rhode Island General Assembly

Office of the House Minority Leader

NEWS

Contact: Ian O'Connor
Tel: (401) 222-2259
Email: IOConnor@rilegislature.gov

Date: February 14, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rep. Lancia Raises Alarm Over 911

STATE HOUSE -- Rep. Robert Lancia (R-Dist. 16, Cranston) is calling for immediate action after allegations of severe understaffing at the state's 911 call center.

Rep. Lancia received an anonymous tip claiming that the 911 office is dangerously understaffed to handle the number of calls coming in. Staffing numbers have dropped below the previous minimum level of 8 personnel with as few as 4 operators handling calls from midnight until morning.

"They're short staffed because of all the early retirements but there's no money in the budget to hire anyone new to replace the people who are leaving. They've had to put thousands of calls on hold because they just don't have the manpower to answer them all" Rep. Lancia's source said in a statement. "It's dangerous and no one at the Governor's office seems to care."

The individual went on to say that the lack of personnel has forced the operators to leave over 13,000 calls on hold and stopped the implementation of the 911 text message system.

The concerns all stem from budgetary issues. The 911 system is funded by a charge on every Rhode Island resident's bill for cell and landline phone services. However, this money does not go directly to the 911 budget. Instead, it is put into the Rhode Island general fund and then distributed at the discretion of the state meaning that the 911 system may be receiving a smaller amount of money than is necessary.

"This is a potential disaster in the making. If a natural disaster or terrorist attack were to strike Rhode Island the 911 system would be overwhelmed. This poor budget management is putting lives at risk all for the sake of funneling cash into government boondoggles" stated Rep. Lancia.

In the past, Rep. Lancia has engaged in efforts to eliminate the tax on Rhode Islanders funding the 911 system. But after speaking with the employee in question he will instead advocate for a restricted receipt account for 911 funding as well as call for a study commission to find out what the actual needs of the facility are. This special account will only be funded by 911 fees and the money in it will be used solely for 911 purposes.

"I want Rhode Islanders to sleep soundly knowing that if they have an emergency there is someone on the other end of the line ready to help. These people play a vital role in our state and its time we start treating them as such"