



Rhode Island General Assembly

Office of the House Minority Caucus

NEWS

Contact: Sue Stenhouse, Director of Communications

Tel: 401-222-1574

Cell: 401-487-5582

Email: sstenhouse@rilegislature.gov

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House Republicans Win Long Fight To Keep RI Phone Customer E911 Fees In Restricted Account

Providence, RI - House Republicans continue the fight for good government in Rhode Island, and just scored a big win for the taxpayer in the proposed FY20 budget: the establishment of restricted receipts accounts for E911 surcharge fees on phone bills. A longtime Republican initiative, this year's bill H5374 codified restricted receipt accounts. This bill was sponsored by Representatives Jack Lyle, Michael Chippendale, David Place, Robert Quattrocchi, George Nardone, Sherry Roberts, Justin Price, Brian Newberry, and Leader Blake Filippi. To comply with federal requirements, the surcharges on phone bills will be split into two separate charges, one to support E911 operations and another for funding other public safety needs. Both will go into restricted receipt accounts.

Rhode Island's E911 surcharge fees came under national scrutiny after House Republicans brought the diversion of fees to light in the FY16 budget review. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) called out Rhode Island in April 2019 for continuing to divert more than \$8 million, or 60 percent of the fees it collected, for 911 and spending it on other budget items. The FCC claims that insufficient funding has "undermined Rhode Island's 911 system, leading to longer wait times, delayed emergency responses, worker fatigue, lower morale and an inability to invest in new systems."

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“We have restored honesty and integrity to the phone fee collection process,” said Representative Jack Lyle, lead sponsor of the legislation. “Monies designated and articulated to the taxpayer for a specific initiative should never be diverted to the General Fund. Period.”

“It is imperative for us to support a robust and responsive E911 call system,” said Representative David Place. “I am pleased that our efforts did not land on deaf ears and that Rhode Island will finally be compliant with the FCC.”

“Republicans will continue to fight for transparency on behalf of the taxpayers,” added Representative George Nardone. “We will not allow Rhode Island taxpayers to be deceived by funding gimmicks that rob Peter to pay Paul. We will be vigilant in our watch over government revenues and government spending, especially with these designated accounts.”

House Republicans continue to review the budget language to ensure that the fee collection process complies with Federal regulations and that taxpayer funding for E911 is protected from being allotted to uses not designated in the fee.

The Rhode Island House of Representatives Minority Caucus (Republican) is comprised of the following elected members representing constituents who live in the following districts throughout the Ocean State: Minority Leader, Blake Filippi, District 36 (Charlestown, South Kingstown, Westerly, New Shoreham); Minority Whip, Michael Chippendale, District 40 (Foster, Gloucester, Coventry); Representative John Lyle, Jr., District 46 (Lincoln, Pawtucket); Representative George Nardone, District 28 (Coventry); Representative Brian Newberry, District 48 (North Smithfield, Burrillville); Representative David Place, District 47 (Burrillville, Gloucester); Senior Deputy Minority Leader Justin Price, District 39 (Exeter, Hopkinton, Richmond); Deputy Minority Leader Robert Quattrocchi, District 41 (Scituate, Cranston); Representative Sherry Roberts, District 29 (Coventry, West Greenwich).