

Date of Hearing: April 19, 2023

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND CONVEYANCE  
Tasha Boerner Horvath, Chair  
AB 296 (Rodriguez) – As Introduced January 26, 2023

**SUBJECT:** Office of Emergency Services: 9-1-1 Public Education Campaign

**SUMMARY:** Would establish the 911 Public Education Campaign, to be administered by the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), for the purpose of educating the public on when it is appropriate to call 911 for assistance. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Would establish the 911 Public Education Campaign, to be administered by the Cal OES, for the purpose of educating the public on when it is appropriate to call 911 for assistance
- 2) Specifies the goals of the campaign to include all of the following:
  - a. Raise public awareness of when to call and when not to call 9-1-1.
  - b. Reduce the number of unnecessary calls to 911 call centers.
  - c. Reduce delays in the 911 system caused by nonemergency 911 calls being placed.
  - d. Reduce the frequency of first responder resources being held or delayed at hospital emergency departments as a result of inappropriate 911 calls.
- 3) Authorizes the office to use federal preparedness grant funds appropriated by the Legislature for these purposes to implement these provisions.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Under the California Emergency Services Act, establishes the California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) within the office of the Governor for the purpose of mitigating the effects of natural, manmade, or war-caused emergencies. (Government Code § 8550)
- 2) Requires Cal OES to develop a plan and timeline of target dates for the testing, implementation, and operation of a Next Generation 911 emergency communication system, including text to 9-1-1 service, throughout California. (Government Code § 53121)
- 3) Establishes the 9-1-1 Emergency Assistance Act, which establishes the number “911” as the primary emergency telephone number for use in this state for any person calling the telephone number “9-1-1” seeking police, fire, medical, and other emergency services. (Government Code § 53100)
- 4) Establishes the State Emergency Telephone Number Account (SETNA) and requires the funds to be only be used for specified purposes. (Revenue & Taxation Code § 41136)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) *Purpose of the bill.* The purpose of this bill is to establish a statewide education campaign to inform the public on the proper use of 911. According to the author, “911 is routinely called inappropriately, and COVID only exacerbated the problem. During the pandemic, Californians experienced surges in demands for COVID-19 testing and vaccinations, extended wait times for emergency care at hospitals, and increases in 9-1-1 EMS response time intervals. As a result of surges in demand for emergency medical services, hospital emergency departments were overcrowded and paramedics and EMTs experienced unduly long wall times.”
- 2) *Research suggests some callers do not use 911 as intended.* Transform 911, a project led by the University of Chicago Health Lab, recently published a report<sup>1</sup> of 911 calls to the largest public communication centers in the country. They found that the most common calls pertained to minor traffic concerns, followed by non-crime administrative or information requests and accidental calls or hang-ups. This organization also states that the tremendous volume and diversity of 911 calls has placed a considerable burden on emergency communications centers, which, coupled with other challenges such as staffing and extended wall times, may severely diminish capacity to respond to calls for service.

The National 911 Program explains that, generally speaking, people are aware that they should call 911 in an emergency, but are less aware of the circumstances in which they should not call 911. This can become an issue when many requests to 911 do not involve emergencies with an immediate threat to life or welfare, thus overloading the 911 system. The report expresses that there is a growing need for targeted and well-coordinated public education efforts about how to use 911 appropriately.

- 3) *The public would benefit from more information about alternatives to 911.* The primary goal of the educational campaign this bill provides is to reduce unnecessary calls to 911, and in turn increase response times for first responders. One way to reduce calls to 911 is to provide alternatives, and alternatives to 911 already exist for non-emergency and non-criminal purposes. Alternative hotlines include three-digit dialing resources for non-emergency issues and municipal services (311), community-based health and human services referrals (211), and the newly established National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (988). Alternative resources to 911 for crisis issues also include helplines for domestic violence support, runaway youth, and human trafficking. However, for alternative hotlines to work effectively, the public needs to know about them, use them, and have sufficient satisfaction with the quality of the response received that they use them again. While the focus of this is to educate the public on the appropriate use of 911, part of that education could be informing the public about the alternatives. Utilizing alternatives to 911 would benefit the 911 system because it has the potential to divert calls to more appropriate first-responders or other civic-services.
- 4) *No source of funding identified.* This bill does not identify a source of funding for the program. There are several potential funding sources including federal grant funds, state general funds, or existing state special funds for the 911 program. The special funds for the

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<sup>1</sup> *Transforming 911 Report.* 2022. TRANSFORM911, The University of Chicago Health Lab.  
<https://www.transform911.org/resource-hub/transforming-911-report/>

911 program are collected from telephone user surcharges and held within the State Emergency Telephone Number Account (SETNA). While the jurisdiction of this committee is not to analyze the fiscal or budgetary implications of this bill, it's worth noting that using SETNA funds for educational purposes is not explicitly authorized under existing law. As such, the author should be advised that statutory changes not currently proposed by this bill would likely be necessary to utilize SETNA funds to implement this bill. Nonetheless, SETNA funds are not the only funds that could be available.

5) *Committee Amendments.* In order to better inform the public on alternatives to 911, which in turn would likely help achieve the objective of this bill, the Chair recommends amending the bill to require the educational campaign to additionally inform the public about alternatives to 911, including the 988 hotline.

6) *Related Legislation.*

- a. AB 40 (Rodriguez), of this session, would codify several recommendations of the EMSA Ambulance Patient Offload Time Committee. The bill is pending in the Assembly Committee on Emergency Management.
- b. AB 1276 (McKinnor), of this session, would require the University of California at Davis Health (UC Davis Health) to establish a program for the receipt and collection of "911" emergency call and dispatch data, in order to complete an analysis of the data for the purpose of improving emergency response services systems, as specified. (Set to be heard by the Assembly Committee on Health on April 11, 2023.)

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

California Fire Chiefs Association  
 California Hospital Association  
 California Public-safety Radio Association  
 California State Sheriffs' Association  
 Emergency Nurses Association, California State Council  
 Fire Districts Association of California  
 Northern California Association of Public-safety Communications Professionals  
 Riverside County Sheriff's Office  
 The California Chapter of The National Emergency Number Association (CALNENA)

### **Opposition**

None on file

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