LAO

The 2026-27 Budget:

# Office of Emergency Services Next Generation 911 System

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## Summary

***State in Process of Transitioning From Legacy 911 to Next Generation 911.*** Next Generation 911 is intended to replace the copper landline-based legacy 911 system with an Internet Protocol (IP)-based system capable of transmitting voice, text, photos, video, and enhanced location data. In 2015, the Legislature directed the Office of Emergency Services (OES) to develop a plan for transitioning to Next Generation 911. Initially, OES adopted a regional approach for the project consisting of four regional networks and a single statewide back-up provider, intended to enhance resiliency of the system.

***Challenges Surfaced During Voice Transition.*** Between 2021 and 2024, 23 dispatch centers began transitioning voice calls to the regional Next Generation 911 system. Some reported routing problems, outages, and dropped calls. In early 2025, OES paused additional transitions and identified concerns related to network complexity, vendor interdependencies, and operational burdens on dispatch staff.

***OES Made Major Changes to Transition Plan in 2025.*** In November 2025, OES released a revised transition plan shifting from the regional model to a statewide approach with one primary and one back-up provider. OES now projects decommissioning the legacy system in 2030—eight years later than previously planned under the regional model. OES has not provided a cost estimate for the statewide approach.

***Available Information Leaves Key Questions Unanswered.*** While OES has provided high-level descriptions of its plans, it has not presented critical details to the Legislature, leaving key questions unanswered, including the following:

- ***What Is the Nature and Scope of the Problem?*** For example, have the regional networks experienced systematic technical failures or are the problems a reflection of management and coordination challenges?
- ***Will New Plan Solve the Problem?*** What evidence is there showing that the transition to a statewide approach will solve the problems identified by OES?
- ***What Other Options Were Considered?*** Does the state need to transition to a statewide approach to solve these problems, or can they be solved within the regional approach as it currently exists? What other options have been explored?
- ***How Do the Options Compare?*** How do different options compare on parameters such as cost, effectiveness of addressing the problems encountered to date, and length of time to decommissioning of the legacy 911 system?

***Recommendations.*** We recommend that the Legislature direct OES to pause implementation of the statewide approach until it can provide answers to the key questions. If this is not possible by May Revision, the Legislature could consider halting the project to allow an independent third-party to evaluate the state's options. We also recommend requiring ongoing monthly project updates and quarterly fiscal reports. Finally, we recommend the Legislature consider implementing a new governance structure to provide greater ongoing oversight of the 911 system.

## Background

***OES Administers State's 911 System, Which Is Funded by a Monthly Surcharge on Telephone Customers.*** The state's 911 system consists of about 450 local dispatch centers (also known as Public Safety Answering Points, or PSAPs) that receive emergency calls from the public and dispatch first responders to assist. Since 2013, OES has been responsible for administering this system. The State 911 Advisory Board, which consists of 11 members (most with expertise in public safety), is responsible for advising OES on matters related to the state's 911 system. Funding for the state's 911 system comes from a monthly surcharge on telephone customers deposited in the State Emergency Telephone Number Account (SETNA). The 911 surcharge is established each fall by OES, though current law caps the surcharge at 80 cents. The 911 surcharge rate for calendar year 2026 is 41 cents. SETNA is expected to receive $215 million in surcharge revenue in 2026-27.

***OES in Process of Transitioning From Legacy 911 to Next Generation 911.*** OES is in the process of transitioning the state from "legacy 911" (designed to operate on copper landlines) to Next Generation 911. Next Generation 911 systems use Internet Protocol (IP)-based technology to send 911 data from one computer to another over the Internet. This technology allows 911 callers to share multimedia emergency communications (voice, video, photos, and text) and improved location data with dispatch centers. It also allows dispatchers to share this data directly with first responders. Additionally, Next Generation 911 systems can be used to automatically re-route 911 calls to other dispatch centers, which can help with high call volumes during natural disasters, large emergencies, or major events; or if one or more dispatch centers stop operating. Major components of Next Generation 911 systems include:

- ***Network***—A Next Generation 911 network delivers emergency communications over an IP-based emergency services network. These networks are specifically designated for use by public safety agencies.
- ***Core Services***—Next Generation 911 core services include the software and databases needed to route emergency communications on the network.
- ***Geographic Information Systems***—These systems provide location data used to direct emergency communications to appropriate dispatch centers and help first responders locate those in need of assistance.
- ***Call Handling Equipment***—This equipment enables a dispatch center to receive, process, and dispatch IP-based emergency communications.

***California Effort to Develop and Deploy Next Generation 911 Dates to at Least 2010.*** The transition from legacy 911 to Next Generation 911 is a nationwide effort. Congress has urged the adoption of IP-based technologies in 911 systems since at least 2008. In more recent years, the National 911 Program (within the U.S. Department of Transportation) began working with stakeholders towards a nationwide, interoperable "system of Next Generation 911 systems" with the goal of connecting 911 systems across state lines. While most states have begun the transition to Next Generation 911, some (such as North Carolina and Massachusetts) are further along the adoption curve. California's effort to develop and deploy a Next Generation 911 system dates to at least July 2010 when the former California State 9-1-1 Office—within the California Technology Agency (CTA), now called the California Department of Technology (CDT)—identified the transition from legacy 911 to Next Generation 911 as a key goal for the state. Then, in the 15 subsequent years, the state took a series of steps towards this goal including, but not limited to, the following key milestones:

- ***2010—First Roadmap Developed.*** In December 2010, the Schwarzenegger administration released a proposed Next Generation 911 roadmap, which outlined key tasks, decision points, and work products necessary to develop a statewide Next Generation 911 system. This roadmap projected that the system would be completed around 2015.
- ***2013 to 2018—Project Moves to OES and Design Validated.*** Responsibility for public safety communications (including the 911 system) was subsequently transferred to OES in 2013 through budget action during the Brown administration. The Legislature

then enacted Chapter 926 of 2014 (SB 1211, Padilla), which directed OES to develop a plan and time line for testing, implementing, and operating a Next Generation 911 system, including text-to-911. OES moved into the planning phase and completed several Next Generation 911 pilot programs used to validate system design. OES reports spending $334 million out of SETNA between 2013-14 and 2016-17 for both legacy and Next Generation 911.

- ***2018-2019—Implementation Funding Requested, Plans Outlined.*** The 2018-19 budget package provided $11.5 million in 2018-19 (increasing annually to $83.6 million in 2022-23) from SETNA and six positions for OES to build out and support the Next Generation 911 system and maintain the legacy 911 system. It was expected that the Next Generation 911 system would be fully implemented in 2022 and that the five-year cost to develop the system would be $132 million, with ongoing operational costs of $40 million annually beginning in 2022-23.
- ***2019—Revenue Increased, Text-to-911 Required, and State Contracts Signed.*** In 2019, three key steps were taken. First, Chapter 54 (SB 96, Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review) changed the structure of the fees that are deposited in SETNA, thereby increasing revenue to enable OES to pay for costs associated with planning, testing, implementing, and operating a Next Generation 911 system. Second, Chapter 237 (AB 1168, Mullin) required all state dispatch centers to deploy a text-to-911 service. Third, OES awarded the five-year contracts that would begin the actual building and deployment of a Next Generation 911 system in this same year.

Legacy 911 and Next Generation 911 were to work in parallel until dispatch centers could be transitioned to the new system—at which point the legacy system would be largely decommissioned. However, a combination of COVID-19-related and operational concerns (described more fully below) delayed the anticipated date at which the legacy 911 system could be decommissioned. As of February 2026, OES anticipates being able to decommission the legacy 911 system in 2030.

***Next Generation 911 Technology Deployed Across Four Main Regions Between 2019 and 2024.*** As originally envisioned, California's approach for a Next Generation 911 system involved breaking the state up into four regions with a single statewide vendor serving as a back-up. These four regions are each served by a regional network service provider (or regional vendor) that is responsible for providing services to connect every dispatch center within the region of the Next Generation 911 network they are responsible for. The prime network service provider (or statewide vendor) is responsible for providing back-up services connecting all 447 dispatch centers statewide. The central purpose of this design is to ensure the system can survive failure. It does so by providing back-ups for network and core services within each region and statewide, and by containing outages within a single area; but requires the regional and statewide networks to work together seamlessly—that is, to interoperate—without sharing each other's components or infrastructure. According to OES, Next Generation 911 network infrastructure "has been installed across the state and is now used to deliver both location services (911 caller location) and text-to-911" at all state dispatch centers. Between July 2019 and August 2025, Next Generation 911 system development costs in accordance with the regional approach totaled $456 million. The total cost to simultaneously operate legacy 911 during these same years was $148 million. Additionally, the state provided support to dispatch centers totaling $253 million.

***COVID-19 Pandemic Delayed Project and Operational Problems Surfaced When Dispatch Centers Began Transitioning Voice Calls to the Next Generation 911 System.*** As with many state operations, the COVID-19 pandemic proved disruptive to the deployment of Next Generation 911. In addition, starting in 2021, 23 of the state's dispatch centers began transitioning voice calls from legacy 911 to Next Generation 911 with some experiencing difficulties. Specifically, some of these early adopters, such as Tuolumne Couty, reported experiencing call routing problems, outages, and

dropped calls. In early 2025, OES paused the transition of additional dispatch centers in order to investigate. It found four main concerns:

- Dispatch centers did not have a clear support process when it was necessary to report a trouble ticket.
- Complexities of the network and interdependencies between the service providers created failure points.
- The regional approach created a situation where both the technical and operational design were significantly adjusted from industry-standard practices, introducing fragility and risk. In particular, OES asserts that the regional approach "requires a large degree of coordination between Next Generation 911 providers and strict adherence to a single set of interface rules which are unique to California's configuration and are not addressed in the National Emergency Numbers Association (NENA) standards."
- Call handling procedures in the hybrid legacy/Next Generation 911 configuration generated additional work for dispatch center staff.

***OES Made Major Changes to Next Generation 911 Transition Plan in 2025.*** In November 2025, OES released an updated *2025 Next Generation 9-1-1 Transition Plan*. Under the updated transition plan, the state will switch from the regional approach to a statewide approach with two statewide network providers—one prime network service provider and a back-up. OES states that the switch to the statewide approach will eliminate the problematic interfaces and complexity while preserving system resiliency. It further notes that the statewide approach comports with Next Generation 911 system standards established by NENA and that it aligns with the "proven network architecture" used by other states. The updated transition plan also provides for the use of "transitional elements." Transitional elements use technology to package calls, such that they are received and can be handled the same way by dispatchers—potentially addressing the challenges reported by some dispatch centers in handling calls in the hybrid legacy/Next Generation 911 configuration. In other words, OES plans to use a technology that will "convert" legacy communications into data that can be transmitted on the Next Generation network.

***Three-Phase Implementation Plan Includes Interim and Long-Term Statewide Contracts.*** OES, in February 2026, indicated that it would deploy statewide Next Generation 911 services in three phases.

- ***Phase One.*** In February 2026, OES reports it will execute an interim contract to move the dispatch centers that are currently using regional Next Generation 911 networks for voice calls to a statewide provider within 90 days. After these dispatch centers have been migrated, OES will focus on deploying Next Generation 911 services to the Los Angeles area, to help prepare for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic games. In addition to these priorities, up to 20 other dispatch centers (those in most urgent need) will also be moved onto the statewide network. As a final part of phase one, in the fall of 2026, OES (in partnership with CDT) will establish long-term contracts with its statewide Next Generation 911 vendor. As part of this procurement process, OES will "require the statewide provider to propose and demonstrate the ability to reach an availability level of 99.999% or better, and the ability to utilize multiple data centers, distribution networks, and aggregation sites."
- ***Phase Two.*** During phase two (late 2026), OES will transition all dispatch centers to the new, long-term, primary statewide network vendor. Transitional elements will be used. This will, among other things, allow dispatch centers to move to the Next Generation 911 network individually. (OES notes that under the previous approach, dispatch centers that transfer calls amongst each other had to migrate together, in a group.)
- ***Phase Three.*** The final phase of the implementation plan involves decommissioning the legacy 911 system with a target date of 2030.

## Governor's Proposal

***Provides Baseline Funding to The Next Generation 911 Project.*** The Governor's budget request would provide OES with $181.4 million from SETNA to support the department's administration of the 911 system, including the Next Generation 911 transition, in 2026-27. This amount is about the same as the 2025-26 funding level.

## Assessment

***Project Is Overdue, Budget Needs Are Unclear.*** The state's time line to Next Generation 911 deployment—which we measure against the date at which most or all of the legacy 911 system can be decommissioned—has been pushed out from 2015-16 (estimated by CTA in 2010) to 2022 (estimated by OES in 2018-19 under the regional approach) to 2030 (under the updated transition plan). Additionally, while some amount of cost overruns are not uncommon for a technology project of this scale and complexity, OES has spent much more than originally anticipated on the development of the Next Generation 911 system. As discussed above, OES projected the development of the system would cost $132 million in its 2018-19 request, but to date has spent $456 million. Moreover, it is unclear how much additional funding will be needed for the state's Next Generation 911 system. The additional amount that would be needed depends on many different variables, including: (1) the extent to which the state is able to incorporate the existing Next Generation 911 components deployed under the regional approach, (2) how quickly it can decommission the legacy 911 system, (3) the cost of the interim contract and solutions, and (4) the time (and cost) of building out and deploying the new statewide system.

***Changes to the State's Next Generation 911 System May Prove Entirely Appropriate, but Changes Always Come With Trade-Offs.*** The regional and statewide approaches each come with advantages and disadvantages. For example, unless the statewide system envisioned by the updated transition plan is designed carefully, the regional approach may offer greater redundancy and may be more able to withstand failure as a result. (In other words, the regional approach *may* be more resilient.) On the other hand, the regional approach may have too much redundancy and may have become so complex that it suffers in operability compared to the envisioned statewide system. It is unclear if OES's choices are consistent with the Legislature's preferences if faced with the same set of options and trade-offs—particularly since OES has not provided information on the trade-offs and costs of the alternatives it considered, nor sought formal legislative input (such as proposing the change through trailer bill language) as it moves forward with its plans.

***Changes of This Magnitude to a Critical Public Safety System Are Best Accomplished Under Close Oversight, Which Is Currently Lacking.*** In the decades since the 911 system was first established, it has developed into a critical part of California's public safety system. As such, major changes to it are best made with close oversight. However, there currently is relatively little oversight of the state Next Generation 911 system. For example, OES is planning to make a fundamental change to the system with major implications for its effectiveness and cost without formal legislative input. Although the state has a 911 Advisory Board, its role with respect to OES and the 911 system is only advisory. Similarly, as a telecommunications project and not an information technology project, Next Generation 911 is not subject to the typical CDT Project Approval Lifecycle (or PAL) process.

***Available Information Leaves Key Questions Unanswered.*** While OES has provided high-level descriptions of its plans, it has not presented critical details to the Legislature, leaving key questions unanswered. Based on the publicly available information, some of the key unanswered questions are:

- ***What Is the Nature and Scope of the Problem?*** Have the regional Next Generation 911 networks experienced systematic technical failures or are the problems OES identified during its investigation a reflection of management and coordination challenges? What caused the call-handling impacts on dispatchers—network, call-handling equipment, a combination, or something else? How many state dispatch centers might be affected by these challenges? If OES enforces

compliance with technical standards more rigorously across the system, would many of the identified problems resolve themselves? Are the interface rules under the regional approach unique to California and not addressed in the NENA standards?

- ***Will New Plan Solve the Problem?*** What evidence is there showing that the transition to a statewide approach will solve the problems identified above or problems that lead OES to propose abandoning the regional approach?
- ***What Other Options Were Considered?*** Does the state need to transition to a statewide approach to solve these problems, or can they be solved within the regional approach as it currently exists? What other options have been explored?
- ***How Do the Options Compare?*** How do different options compare on: cost, effectiveness of addressing the problems encountered to date, redundancy and resiliency, impact on dispatch centers, length of time to decommissioning of the legacy 911 system, management and coordination needs, as well as significant technical and operational trade-offs?
- ***How Will the State's Next Generation 911 System Comply With State Privacy and Security Regulations and Laws?*** Have these protections been integrated into the Next Generation 911 system as it exists (now) and as planned under the statewide approach, or will these protections be developed? Will the state be able to undertake periodic, independent security audits of the system and all of its components? If security and privacy protections need to be upgraded or added on later, who will pay for these improvements?
- ***Is There Sufficient Oversight of This Project?*** What policies and governance models are needed to ensure that the transition to Next Generation 911 is successful?

***911 Will Continue to Evolve Technologically—Meaning Ongoing Oversight Is Likely Necessary.*** Although the underlying technologies that enabled the legacy 911 system stayed (relatively) constant for a period, the advent and diffusion of IP-based technologies invite a more dynamic view. In other words, at least theoretically, an IP-enabled 911 system has the technological capacity to incorporate new and innovative features, applications, data, software, and hardware. As a result, policymakers may find that questions related to the budget, policy, and oversight of the state's 911 technology may begin to surface more frequently than has been the case historically. This suggests that, even after the transition to Next Generation 911 is complete, the legislature might want to ensure it maintains consistent oversight over the continued operation of the system.

## Recommendations

***Pause the Transition to the Statewide Approach Until OES Provides Information...*** We recommend the Legislature direct OES to pause its transition to the statewide approach to allow for legislative hearings (preferably prior to the release of May Revision). We recommend the Legislature conduct oversight hearings in order to gather information on the key questions we raise above. In particular, we recommend directing OES to provide an analysis of options, including the statewide approach, the regional approach, and a third approach (such as a hybrid). This analysis should compare the options based on the key parameters described above (such as cost and effectiveness of addressing the problems encountered to date) as well as any others deemed relevant by OES.

***...Or Seek an Independent, Third-Party Evaluation.*** If OES cannot provide this information, then we recommend that the Legislature consider prohibiting OES from implementing the statewide approach until an independent third party with appropriate technical expertise evaluates the state's options. This evaluation should include a clear identification of the challenges with the system as currently built and a discrete set of options to address those challenges, as well as defined cost and operational trade-offs for each option. These options should include fixing the system as currently designed, transitioning to a statewide approach, and any other option that is deemed worthy of legislative consideration. This could be

accomplished by directing the State Auditor to carry out such an assessment. We acknowledge that this recommendation will add additional costs to SETNA in the short term—both from the direct cost of the assessment, as well as from project delays that will extend the need for maintaining the legacy 911 system. Moreover, we recognize that this recommendation comes with some risk as it would delay the decommissioning of the legacy 911 system. This is a risk as the existing state 911 system is in very poor condition and is subject to failure. However, if the statewide approach does not work as envisioned then failure could be the outcome anyway. Taking this step will allow the Legislature to be confident that whatever approach it ultimately chooses to adopt is cost-effective and can deliver this critical service to Californians.

***Quarterly Fiscal Reports and Monthly Progress Reports to the Legislature.*** In the *2025-26 Budget Act*, the Legislature directed OES to provide two reports on major challenges, solutions, expenditures, and a time line for the Next Generation 911 system. We recommend that the Legislature continue to direct OES to provide project and expenditure reports to the Legislature, preferably on a monthly (project) and quarterly (expenditures) basis in 2026-27 and ongoing until legacy 911 has been fully decommissioned. We also recommend that the Legislature direct OES to develop and update (on a quarterly basis) a five-year cost outlook for legacy 911, supporting dispatch centers, and Next Generation 911.

***Consider Governance Options and Oversight for the Long Term.*** As an IP-enabled system, Next Generation 911 will have the (theoretical) capacity to integrate new and innovative features, services, software, hardware, and applications in a manner that was not the norm for legacy 911. The Legislature may wish to consider whether ongoing oversight might be appropriate even after the new system is operational, and if so, what form that oversight should take. One option for determining what form the oversight could take would be to request the Little Hoover Commission to assess California's governance model for Next Generation 911 and provide the Legislature with recommendations. This assessment could include a review of how other states manage these systems and which stakeholders in state and local government should be involved.

## LAO PUBLICATIONS

This report was prepared by Heather Gonzalez, and reviewed by Drew Soderborg and Ross Brown. The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) is a nonpartisan office that provides fiscal and policy information and advice to the Legislature.

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