

PS COMMITTEE #2
September 16, 2019

MEMORANDUM

September 11, 2019

TO: Public Safety Committee

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

SUBJECT: **Update: Public Safety Department Contingency Plans for Radio System**

PURPOSE: **To receive updated information on Public Safety Department Contingency Plans in the event of a Radio System Disruption**

Those expected to brief the Joint Committee include:

Angela Talley, Director, Department of Correction and Rehabilitation (DOCR)
Acting Assistant Chief Dinesh Patil, Management Services Bureau, Montgomery County Police Department
Assistant Chief Ed Radcliffe, Communications, Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service (MCFRS)
Mike Knuppel, Public Safety System Modernization Director, Department of Technology Services (DTS)
Jason Galey, Department of Transportation (DOT)
Joe Webster, DTS
Gerry Adcock, DTS
Rachel Silberman, Office of Management and Budget (OMB)
Trevor Lobaugh (OMB)

BACKGROUND

The current public safety radio tower system that provides communication among the 911 call center (Public Safety Communication Center, or PSCC), police, fire, ambulances, and other users, is past its end-of-life date (2009) and has recently experienced significant system disruptions. These disruptions are being handled as they occur, but system uptime cannot be guaranteed in a reliable manner. Recent known disruptions include Mothers' Day weekend (May 10-11), May 22, May 28, and July 10. The PSCC also experienced a technical issue that resulted in dropped calls on July 18, but that was not related to the radio system. Council staff is not aware of any outages in August or September.

A replacement system was approved by the Council and funds appropriated for its construction as part of the CIP project called "Public Safety System Modernization." Its full deployment has been delayed several times. The Council has been briefed on project delays over the past several months. The Executive is on track to meet the December 2020 cutover date to a new system that will provide 95% coverage with 95% reliability, as required by contractual plan specifications.

DEPARTMENT CONTINGENCY PLANS

According to the Executive, police and fire have long had in place emergency/contingency plans for communications to ensure the continued delivery of public safety service should a short-term communication failure occur.

The radio system has the ability to operate in three modes, including full trunking, site trunking, and failsoft. All three of these modes are dependent on the FiberNet 1 being functional. Council staff notes that FiberNet 1 is the cause of the most recent failures. Public Safety personnel can also continue to leverage the use of other conventional radio channels that exist in the County.

As reported to the Council in June, the Executive branch is developing contingency plans for long-term outages, including outages due to network failure. These include cellular and push-to-talk options. Public safety agencies were asked to have these plans prepared by September, and exercises are planned later this year.

UPDATE

Executive staff are prepared to provide updated information on contingency plans, associated costs, and next steps. Due to the nature of the information provided, the Committee may propose to hold a closed session.