



# NEWS

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS**  
**COURT HOUSE, NORRISTOWN, PA., BOX 311, 19404-0311**

**Frank X. Custer, Communications Director**

**Jessica Willingham, Communications Assistant**

**PHONE (610) 278-3061 FAX 278-5943**

**COMMISSIONERS: JOSH SHAPIRO, *Chair***

**LESLIE S. RICHARDS, *Vice Chair*, BRUCE L. CASTOR, JR., *Commissioner***



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## **Castor and Colleagues Decry Lack of Legislative Action on 9-1-1 Funding Formula**

**Norristown, PA (October 2, 2014)** – Using a recently released audit of the Montgomery County Department of Public Safety’s 9-1-1 Emergency Communications Fund as a basis, Montgomery County Commissioner Bruce L. Castor, Jr., who oversees public safety matters for the Board, today renewed his plea to state legislators to take action to fix the outdated fee-based system that is causing county budgets to bleed red ink.

Commissioners Josh Shapiro and Leslie Richards joined Castor in urging legislators to take action.

The funding system for 9-1-1 operations was designed by the Commonwealth to be a fee-based system. Despite an increase in personnel and technology costs required to operate the system, the General Assembly has failed to increase fee levels, which has required county governments to increasingly supplement operations. Additionally, fees from wireless phone lines are not distributed according to county of origination, and Montgomery County is not getting its fair share of the wireless portion of the fees.

“The comprehensive audit completed by Controller Stewart Greenleaf and his staff clearly provides the evidence that this funding mechanism is outdated and needs to be changed,” Castor said. “Without action, this problem will only get worse and put a greater burden on Montgomery County and counties across the state.”

“The fees (levied on land lines and mobile phones) have not been adjusted since 1996, and the world of telephone communications has changed dramatically since then,” Castor continued. “As the number of land lines has continued to decline precipitously, and the fact that wireless fees are not distributed fairly to our county, our taxpayers are on the losing end of this calculus.”

The audit by Controller Greenleaf examined the financial statements of the Emergency Communications fund for the years 2011, 2012, and 2013. The audit showed that revenues from the Commonwealth's funding mechanism fell from \$11.6 million in 2011 to \$10.1 million in 2013. That is a decline in revenues of 13 percent. At the same time, personnel costs for the operation of the 9-1-1 system increased by 15 percent going from \$8.8 million in 2011 to \$10.1 million in 2013.

"The state must meet its obligations to the people of Montgomery County," said Josh Shapiro, chair of the county commissioners. "The current system is inequitable and must change. We need a system in place at the state level that fully funds the 9-1-1 operations, as required by law."

The Controller's audit revealed that the county had to augment the 9-1-1 fund with \$1.3 million of county taxpayer dollars in 2011. By 2013 that figure rose to \$2.5 million.

"By the Legislature's inaction on this issue, they wrongly are creating an unfunded mandate on the people of Montgomery County and taxpayers across the Commonwealth," said Richards.