

1 HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 57

2 INTRODUCED BY S. KLAKKEN

3
4 A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF
5 MONTANA REQUESTING AN INTERIM STUDY TO REVIEW THE STATEWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY
6 COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM ACT; EXAMINING HOW THE STATEWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY
7 COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM ACT IMPACTS RESPONSES TO EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS AND
8 NATURAL DISASTERS; EXAMINING THE FUNCTIONALITY, SUSTAINABILITY, AND FUTURE NEEDS OF
9 THE STATEWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM; AND REQUIRING THAT THE FINAL
10 RESULTS OF THE STUDY BE REPORTED OT THE 70TH LEGISLATURE.
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12 WHEREAS, wildfires, extreme weather events, and other natural disasters have highlighted
13 communication challenges for first responders and the paramount importance of having a reliable, interoperable
14 radio communications system for public safety in Montana for both urban, in-building coverage and rural and
15 forested area coverage; and

16 WHEREAS, Interoperability Montana was an effort created in 2005 to design and build a statewide
17 interoperable radio communications system with a goal of improving and expanding interoperable
18 communications throughout the state but was disbanded in 2011 because the project lacked a statutory basis;
19 and

20 WHEREAS, in 2017, the 65th Montana Legislature recognized these challenges and enacted the
21 Statewide Public Safety Communications System Act through House Bill 604, codifying the policy of the state to
22 promote and encourage coordination, efficient planning, cost-effective deployment, and sustainability of public
23 safety communications technology and infrastructure; and

24 WHEREAS, in September 2019, the Department of Justice contracted with telecommunications
25 companies to replace all equipment in the inherited system that was no longer supported and to upgrade and
26 maintain the equipment as needed over the next 10 years, and the department has since set up the Statewide
27 Public Safety Communications System and hired a program manager and two technicians to maintain,
28 upgrade, and operate the system; and

1 WHEREAS, the Department of Justice received funding for the Statewide Public Safety
2 Communications System from the 66th Legislature in the amount of \$3.75 million for each fiscal year beginning
3 July 1, 2019, and ending June 30, 2029; and

4 WHEREAS, the 68th Legislature transferred \$18.6 million from the general fund to the statewide public
5 safety communications system account to pay off the program debt and also terminated the \$3.75 million
6 annual appropriation in July 2023, creating a shortfall in funding for the program at the end of fiscal year 2027;
7 and

8 WHEREAS, in 2024, the Statewide Public Safety Communications System consisted of 74 radio tower
9 sites, 15 dispatch centers across Montana, and a microwave network connecting these critical components;
10 and

11 WHEREAS, local government entities, tribal nations, state agencies, and federal partners, now
12 amounting to over 12,000 users, have increasingly leveraged the statewide infrastructure to enhance their local
13 coverage and interoperability, demonstrating the value and efficiency of a shared system; and

14 WHEREAS, the Montana Legislature acknowledges that a consistent, continuous, and cost-effective
15 statewide public safety communications system is essential for the protection of public and private property and
16 the safety of Montana's citizens and emergency responders; and

17 WHEREAS, ongoing technological advancements and the evolving needs of public safety necessitate a
18 comprehensive review of the existing Statewide Public Safety Communications System to ensure its continued
19 effectiveness, identify areas for potential improvement, and plan for future sustainability and expansion; and

20 WHEREAS, upcoming FBI Criminal Justice Information Services requirements to encrypt wireless
21 communications may require significant upgrades impacting all users; and

22 WHEREAS, it is prudent to examine the long-term funding mechanisms required to maintain, upgrade,
23 and expand the Statewide Public Safety Communications System to meet the growing demands and ensure its
24 viability for future generations of Montanans and emergency responders; and

25 WHEREAS, a thorough interim study will provide the Legislature with the necessary information to
26 make informed decisions regarding the future of this vital public safety infrastructure.

27
28 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF

1 THE STATE OF MONTANA:

2 That the Legislative Council be requested to designate an appropriate interim committee or statutory
3 committee, pursuant to section 5-5-217, MCA, to review and propose legislation to improve and sustain the
4 Statewide Public Safety Communications System. The study should:

5 (1) review the implementation and effectiveness of the Statewide Public Safety Communications
6 System Act and assess the current administrative structure under the Department of Justice and the role of the
7 Statewide Public Safety Communications System Advisory Council;

8 (2) review the governance structure and operational practices of the Statewide Public Safety
9 Communications System to ensure efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness to the needs of all
10 participating agencies;

11 (3) evaluate the current functionality and coverage of the Statewide Public Safety Communications
12 System and consider the integration of local, tribal, state, and federal systems and the benefits of the trunked
13 radio technology employed;

14 (4) examine the long-term sustainability of the Statewide Public Safety Communications System,
15 including an analysis of current funding sources, projected maintenance and upgrade costs, and potential
16 alternative or supplemental funding mechanisms to ensure its continued operation and necessary expansions;

17 (5) assess the interoperability of the Statewide Public Safety Communications System with other
18 communication systems, including legacy systems and systems used by neighboring states and federal
19 agencies, and explore opportunities to enhance seamless communication across jurisdictions and technological
20 platforms;

21 (6) investigate the potential for integrating new and emerging communication technologies into the
22 Statewide Public Safety Communications System to enhance its capabilities and meet future public safety
23 needs, including advancements in data communication and broadband services; and

24 (7) consider the staffing and technical expertise required to effectively maintain, operate, and
25 expand the Statewide Public Safety Communications System, drawing comparisons with staffing levels and
26 organizational models in other states with similar systems.

27 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the interim committee or statutory committee shall consult with
28 relevant stakeholders, including representatives from the Department of Justice, the Statewide Public Safety

1 Communications System Advisory Council, local government entities, tribal governments, state agencies,
2 federal partners, 9-1-1 dispatch centers, and industry experts, to gather comprehensive information and diverse
3 perspectives.

4 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all aspects of the study, including presentation and review
5 requirements, be concluded prior to September 15, 2026.

6 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the final results of the study, including any findings, conclusions,
7 comments, or recommendations of the appropriate committee, be reported to the 70th Legislature.

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