



## NASCIO 2018 Recognition Awards Nomination

In Delaware, **CALL 911** if you can.

**TEXT 911 IF YOU CAN'T.**

### **State of Delaware**

**Enhanced 9-1-1 Emergency Reporting System Service Board and  
Department of Technology and Information**

### **Text 911 - A Speechless Crisis Communication Option**

**Category: Information Communications Technology Initiatives**

**Project Initiated: Grant Award 2015**

**Project Completed: (ongoing) Expansion - March, 2017**

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## Executive Summary

In March, 2018, Delaware joined Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Indiana and Puerto Rico to become the sixth U.S. state/territory to offer [statewide availability of Text-to-911](#). Delaware Department of Safety and Homeland Security, Delaware law enforcement and first responders, in cooperation with the Department of Technology & Information (DTI) worked to upgrade equipment and operating software in 911 Centers, funded through the State's Enhanced 911 Emergency Reporting System Service (E911) Board. As part of an effort to enhance Delaware's 911 service to create a faster and more resilient system, Next Generation 911 (NG911) was initiated in the state of Delaware in 2015. The NG911 network replaces copper lines with an Emergency Services Internet Protocol (IP) network (ESInet). This transition provides the technology needed to support text messaging. It also provides redundancy, allowing for re-routing of 911 calls to other call centers as needed. It is also a first step in the eventual ability of 911 Centers to be able to accept other types of data transmissions, including images and video.

Though available since the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) pushed call centers in 2014 to accept texts in addition to voice calls, it has been slow to gain traction as it is a developing technology with limitations. Unlike traditional landlines, cellular phones are not registered to a physical address but transmit location using wireless GPS. Messages do not share GPS location data as cellular voice calls do, nor are they always transmitted in real time, so delivery could be delayed. Delaware's education campaign encourages texters to send their location, if known, in the first message they transmit, with which emergency service responder (Fire, Police, Ambulance) they are seeking.

Text-to-911 is intended for instances in which it is not possible or safe for a person to make a voice call—either due to hearing/speech challenges or because making a voice call might compromise the caller's safety, such as in a criminal incident, or domestic violence situation in progress. It extends the critical 911 lifeline to persons with hearing and speech disabilities, who now have a powerful tool to connect directly with first responders. With most people now carrying cell phones, the majority of 911 calls no longer initiate from landlines at a fixed physical address. Consequently, with Text-to-911, Delaware's E911 Board moved to adapt to changes in technology, public safety needs and user habits. Implementing this service increases accessibility to emergency services for an estimated 25,000 deaf and hard-of-hearing Delawareans, along with others for whom voice communication by phone is challenging or impossible, moving Delaware closer to the goal of being the First State for accessibility.



## Exemplar

Delaware is a small state, geographically, with only three counties. New Castle, in the north, is largely urban/suburban, while the two largest geographically are Kent, with the state capital of Dover at its center, and largely rural Sussex

which has a seasonally densely populated coastal resort area. These counties are autonomously run, and emergency services are provided through a combination of town, city, county and state resources. The State of Delaware's Department of Safety and Homeland Security (DSHS) has a number of divisions that support, both directly and indirectly, county and municipal agencies and emergency services providers. Enhanced 911 Delaware (E911) is charged with protecting and enhancing public safety and health by facilitating the operation and maintenance of efficient, state-of-the-art, Enhanced 911 services. The E911 Board, empaneled in 2001, chaired by the DSHS Cabinet Secretary with representation from DTI and local 911 agencies and providers, is responsible for oversight of E911 and Next Generation 911 (NG911) capabilities. Equipping Delaware for Text-to-911 was a natural step in the transition to NG911.

Delaware's Text to 911 service not only supports Delaware Governor Carney's accessibility commitment but also his public service and safer community's priority of using new technologies to protect the citizens of our state. "There are many emergency situations that occur each day placing our citizens in a position where making a call is not possible," said Governor Carney. "Text-to-911 is a life-saving technology, giving our citizens one more way to reach out for help when they need it most. This is just another step Delaware is taking to make our communities safer." [Press release 3/5/18]. As of December 2017, according to the FCC, only 10% of the country's 6,500 dispatchers are currently able to receive emergency texts to 911. Delaware is one of the few to offer it statewide in all three counties. The initial success of this service is a consequence of the effective collaboration with the state's law enforcement, first responders, Department of Safety and Homeland Security agency, the E911 Board members, and vendor support. These entities efficiently worked together to bring Text to 911 to the state of Delaware.



**Governor John Carney**   
@JohnCarneyDE



We are live to demonstrate the new enhanced 911 feature, "Text to 911." #netDE

WATCH: [livestream.com/StateofDelaware...](https://livestream.com/StateofDelaware)  
[Facebook.com/johncarneyde](https://Facebook.com/johncarneyde)

10:15 AM - Mar 5, 2018 · Cpl. Paul J Sweeney Public Safety Building

♥ 26  See Governor John Carney's other Tweets



## Concept

Delaware Department of Safety and Homeland Security Secretary Robert Coupe and Delaware CIO, James Collins, co-chairs of Delaware's E911 Board, funded the upgrades to the equipment and operating systems necessary to facilitate the Text to 911 service. Text to 911 is the ability to send a text message to 911 from a mobile phone or Internet-connected hand-held device. Messages are routed to the appropriate Delaware 911 center in a designated queue. This service is intended for use in three emergency situations:

- By an individual who is deaf, hard of hearing, or has a speech disability.
- By someone in a situation where it is not safe to place a voice call to 911
- By a person experiencing a medical emergency that renders the person incapable of speech

The individual simply enters the numbers "911" in the "To" or "Recipient" field. The text message itself should be short, first including the physical address of the emergency occurring. A dispatcher will reach out to the texter to acquire further details. The slogan, "Call 911 when you can. Text 911 when you can't" is being communicated throughout the state, emphasizing that calling 911 is still the best option since voice calls are real-time communication and Text to 911 using SMS messaging is not. However, for those that do not have the ability to make a voice call, Text to 911 offers a lifesaving alternative in emergency situations.

A widespread communication and awareness campaign has been rolled out for this new service. Delaware E911 Board and Administrator partnered with a local advertising



company, ABC Creative Advertising, to educate users and spread the message, "Call 911 if you can, Text to 911 if you can't". Delaware 911 kicked off the campaign via a press release and Governor Carney hosted local events conducting live demonstrations of the new service. Social media and other media platforms, including frequent radio announcements, news articles, and billboards on major highways throughout the state, are being used to share the information.

Delaware's nine 911 centers in collaboration with the Delaware Department of Safety and Homeland Security and Delaware State Police began accepting emergency requests for help through text messages in March.

There are many emergency situations that occur each day placing citizens in a position where making a call may not be possible. Text-to-911 is a life-saving technology and a step Delaware is taking to make our communities safer. It is meant for times when a call to 911 is not possible due to the caller being incapable of speech during an emergency, if the caller is hard of hearing, or if the caller is in a situation where it is not safe to place a voice call. Recent upgrades to equipment and operating system software in 911 Centers provided the technology needed to support text messaging. This project transitioned the State's 911 emergency communications system which operated on copper lines to an Internet based system with more flexibility for communication and interoperability.

Text to 9-1-1 announcements can be found at <https://www.delawareonline.com/videos/news/2018/03/05/sending-text-911-now-available-delaware/111114432/>

<https://statescoop.com/delaware-begins-text-to-911-service>



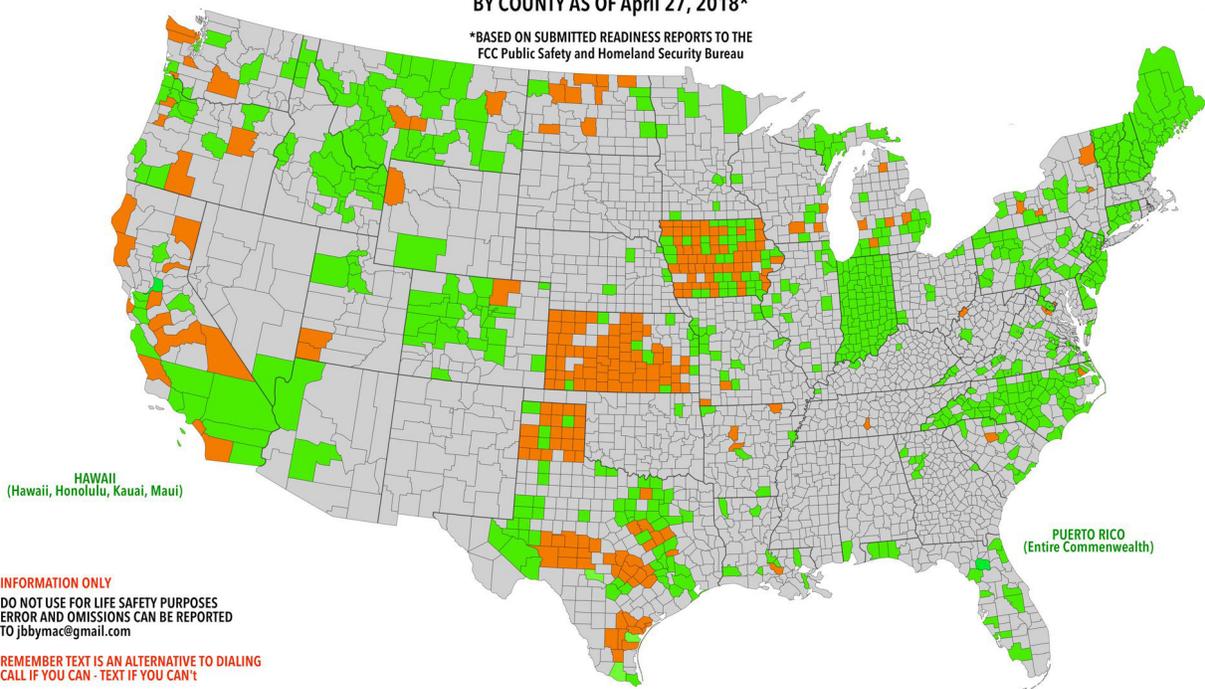
## Significance

Delaware is an early adopter and deployer of statewide enhanced 911 technology, as only the sixth state or U.S. territory to enable statewide Text-to-911 service. This project also provided the new technology that significantly improves operations and redundancy for Delaware's 911 centers making emergency communication more reliable and efficient

**April 27, 2018**

TEXT TO 9-1-1  
PSAP READINESS REPORT - **CURRENT** and **FUTURE**  
BY COUNTY AS OF April 27, 2018\*

\*BASED ON SUBMITTED READINESS REPORTS TO THE  
FCC Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau



for Delawareans and the public safety community.

Implementing Text to 911 increases accessibility of emergency services to about 25,000 deaf and hard of hearing Delaware residents, offering an option beyond traditional TTY (teletypewriter technology that launched in the 1960s) and relay services with limited operating hours because they need an intermediary volunteer. It also offers help for people with speech impediments or difficulties expressing themselves clearly on a voice call. It also can be a lifesaver in situations where a person needs to reach 911 without being heard or when making a phone call would put the caller in danger. The new infrastructure will enable Delaware to accept other types of electronic data such as pictures and videos in the future.



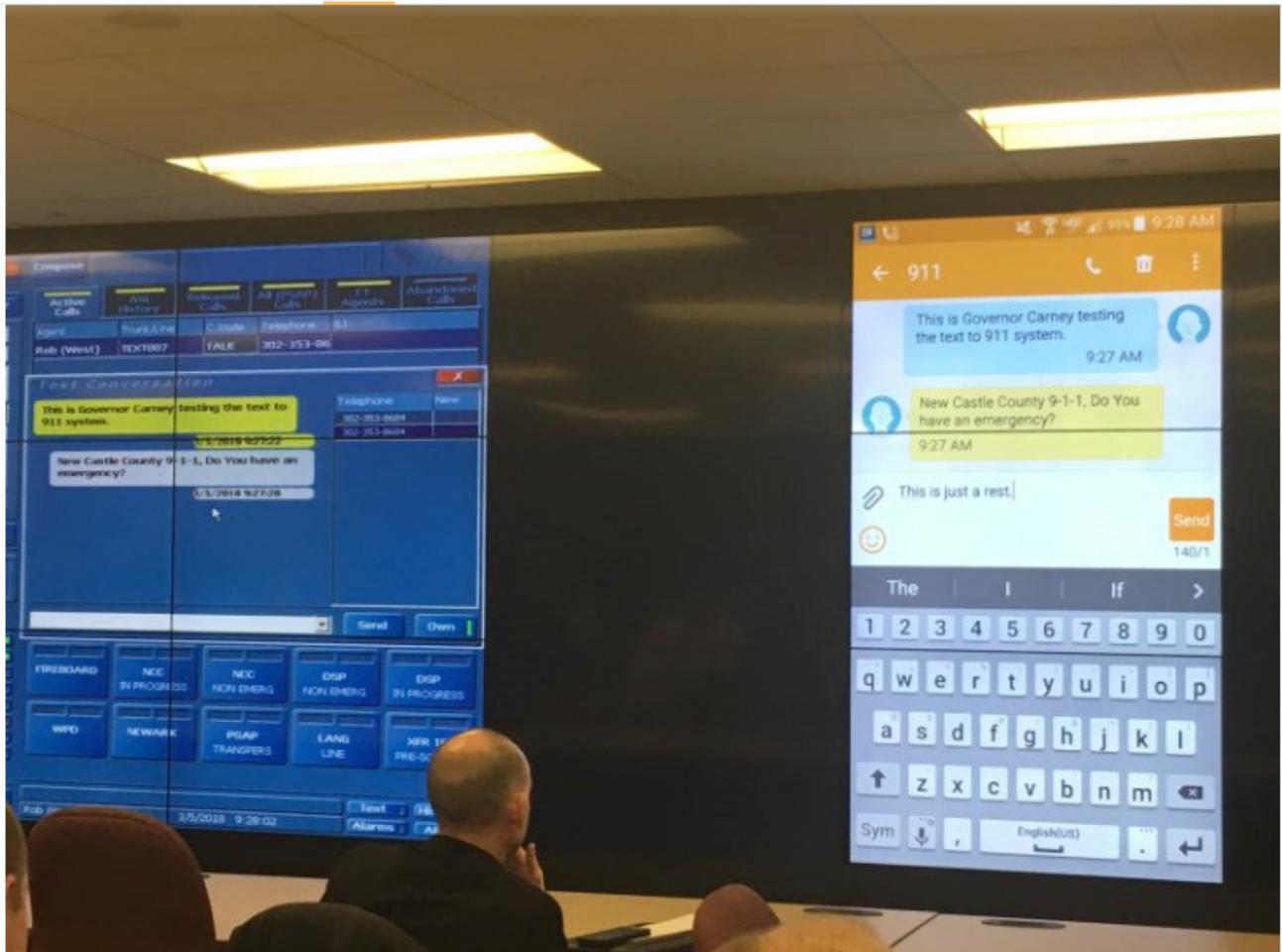
## **Impact**

911 centers received over 60 texts since inception of the service statewide. The value to users of successful outcomes and assistance provided is immeasurable. That number is expected to increase as the media campaign is broadened.

Text to 911 increases access equality for about 25,000 deaf and hard of hearing Delawareans, as well as people with speech difficulties and other barriers to speaking on the phone. Text to 911 option is direct and immediate and can be a critical life saving option for this community making emergency services equally accessible to all.

Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence Executive Director Sue Ryan praised the service. In 2017 there were over 22,000 reported cases of domestic violence reported in Delaware, but still there were many incidents that went unreported. The Text to 911 option offers victims the ability to notify authorities without ever saying a word. That was the case for a New Castle woman involved in a domestic dispute while the system was being tested in February. It was the first text message received by the new system, according to New Castle County 911 Center Chief Jeffrey Miller. "It was from a female who was unable, due to a domestic situation, to make a phone call in front of the person that she was having issue with so she chose to text, and luckily for us it was working." A nearby officer arrived on scene in less than four minutes and was able to take a male subject into custody. "We had a great resolve to what surely is the beginning of a technology that is going to save lives," Miller said.

The impact of Text to 911 also expands to other people in need and in difficult situations in which making noise would increase the danger like if hiding from an intruder or being chased. It could also come into play if you're in an area where cell service is minimal and calls are difficult to connect. The Text to 911 option was recently utilized by a minor who was being bullied and threatened with serious violence. Another minor utilized the service to notify authorities of a domestic dispute occurring in their house. There were four minors in the house and the oldest of the minors notified police via text. Law enforcement arrived on the scene before the situation escalated.



📷 Delaware leaders unveil the state's new text-to-911 system at the New Castle County 911 center. (Mark Eichmann/WHYY)

In addition, an unforeseen benefit is to visitors and vacationers of Delaware. Despite being one of the smallest states, Delaware receives approximately 9 million visitors a year. The majority of these visitors come to visit Delaware's renowned pristine beaches in the popular Rehoboth and Dewey beach areas. To put this fact in perspective, New York City has a population of approximately 8.5 million people. In just two months during the summer, Delaware hosts more than the entire population of NYC. The Text to 911 option creates another avenue of emergency response for the state's welcomed visitors.

Although the number of text messages received to date has been low statewide, the successful outcomes and assistance provided to the users is immeasurable. Delaware still encourages calling 911 when possible and only using text when absolutely necessary, but as the awareness campaign continues, Delaware expects to see the usage number increase and become an invaluable tool in emergency situations. The Text to 911 service is another step in Delaware's journey to make emergency services more reliable, efficient and accessible to all residents and communities in the state.