

NEW JERSEY DATA

N.J. raided your tax money intended for critical 911 upgrades. 'Quit it!' lawmaker says

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Rep. Leonard Lance, R-7th Dist., has a message for Trenton: Hands out of the cookie jar.

For more than a decade, New Jersey has been one of the nation's chief scofflaws in diverting funding intended for its 911 system. Each year, the state collects about \$130 million through a monthly \$0.90 tax charged to everyone who owns a mobile phone.

But of the nearly \$2 billion that's been taken from taxpayers since 2004, only \$350 million has actually gone toward maintaining and upgrading the system.

"Lawmakers in Trenton raided the fund set aside to improve the 9-1-1 system and left the account penniless - leaving public safety threatened and taxpayers on the hook," Lance said. "Members of the Communications and Technology Subcommittee are seeking to end this practice."



New Jersey's 911 fee spending since 2005



New Jersey has collected more than \$1.3 billion through the 911 System and Emergency Response Fee since 2005. But just a fraction of that funding has gone towards maintaining and upgrading 911 service in the Garden State.



	Diverted	911
2005	91,958,000	27,567,000
2006	83,058,000	50,867,000
2007	94,142,000	44,783,000
2008	103,558,000	37,867,000
2009	124,033,000	
2010	115,133,000	
2011	112,728,000	
2012	111,728,000	
2013	110,728,000	
2014	106,728,000	
2015	107,578,000	
2016	111,178,000	
2017	97,478,000	26,822,000
2018	106,578,000	27,722,000
2019 (budgeted)	104,178,000	30,822,000

Source: NJ State Budget • [Get the data](#) • [Created with Datawrapper](#)

In July, Lance introduced "The 911 Fee Integrity Act," a bill that would empower the federal government to crack down on states diverting funding dedicated to the 911 system for other purposes.

For its part, New Jersey has long argued that it does not divert funding and the disbursement of the funding is in line with the law's initial intent. Gov. Phil Murphy has yet to take a position on the issue, and the governor's office did not return requests for comment.





In 2016, an NJ Advance Media investigation found just 15 percent of the funding collected by the tax had been used on the 911 system.

The state has since more than doubled the annual funding to the system, from about \$13 million to just over \$30 million, but 77 percent of the funding still goes toward other areas of the budget.

And the dozens of local 911 call centers that form the backbone of the state haven't seen a dime from the fund in more than a decade.

A package of bills introduced in the state Legislature earlier this year seeks to address this.

The latest bills (A2371, A3742) would require the hundreds of 911 call centers in the state to be equipped with NextGen 911 within three years. The upgrade, estimated at nearly \$100 million, would be paid for through an additional 9 cents charged to every monthly phone bill, bringing the total service fee to 99 cents.



But absent a constitutional amendment, legislators would not be able to guarantee the additional funding would actually go toward the system. A constitutional amendment was proposed in 2016 but stalled.

Enter Lance, who said he was tired of waiting for the state to come up with a fix itself.

"I do not believe Trenton will solve this on its own," Lance, a former state assemblyman, said with a chuckle. "I think this has teeth and would certainly be a step in the right direction."

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