



State of Vermont
Department of Public Safety
45 State Drive
Waterbury, Vermont 05671-1300
<http://dps.vermont.gov/>

June 8, 2022

Dear Agency and Department Heads:

Staffing shortages at the Westminster Communication Center have reached a point that requires operational changes to maintain essential services. This memo outlines current challenges, highlights items that have been or will be implemented, and identifies immediate steps for partner agencies to take to ensure the continuity of safe, efficient and coordinated delivery of public safety services to Vermonters.

Current situation at Westminster

- Current staffing: 18 out of 28 FTE positions = 36% vacancy rate
 - 2 resignations this week with two-week notice = 43% vacancy rate
 - 3 planned retirements over the next three months = 54% vacancy rate

Work environment at Westminster

- The current staff is doing an incredible job maintaining high standards of service and professionalism.
- Recruiting efforts are ongoing but not keeping up with the job demand.
- Calls for mental health services and violent crime have increased at a significant rate.
- Non-emergency/administrative call volume also is increasing.
- Dispatchers are working mandatory overtime, extended shifts and have limited days off.

Efforts taken so far or in progress:

- Shifting workload from Westminster to other sections within DPS.
- Updating DPS phone system to reduce non-emergency/administrative telephone call volume.
- Continuing with efforts to stand up new regional dispatching centers.
- Improved dispatcher pay with various incentives.
- Establishing a 12-hour shift so centers can operate with fewer staff.

Immediate Action Items for Departments:

- Require jurisdictions take all non-emergency/administrative calls, not forwarding those calls into an emergency communications center.
 - Business-related calls on administrative phone lines should be answered locally instead of being routed to the PSAPs. Administrative calls will be routed back automatically to the local agency. We encourage agencies to create voice mail systems that advise caller to contact a state PSAP IF they require a first responder but do not direct callers to the PSAP for other calls such as seeking a call back from an employee, passing along a concern or complaint, or general inquiries not related to the need for an immediate response.
- Require fire and EMS agencies handle secondary communication needs after initial dispatch is received and acknowledged unless mutual aid is requested or additional agencies or resources are needed.
- Request agencies explore alternate dispatching services when possible, and accelerate work to move to a statewide system of regional communications as swiftly as possible.
- Require law enforcement agencies and officers maximize the benefits and efficacy of Valcour for routine queries such as records checks, and reduce this type of administrative phone and radio traffic into the dispatch centers.



Over the past two years Vermont's first responder community has worked together to solve problems and overcome unprecedented challenges. We stand united and will continue to find creative solutions that enable us to provide exceptional emergency services in Vermont.

Thank you for your service.

Sincerely,



Michael Schirling
Commissioner