

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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FRANKLIN COUNTY RESIDENTS CAN NOW TEXT-TO-911 IN AN EMERGENCY

After more than two years of work and cooperation between the county and its jurisdictions, Franklin County residents can now send text messages to 911 dispatchers - with one very key caveat. "If a person has the choice between calling or texting 911 centers throughout Franklin County, please call if you can and text if you can't," said Franklin County Commissioner Marilyn Brown, who chairs the county-wide 911 Planning Committee. "Calling is better than texting because emergency dispatchers can get more immediate answers to questions from callers, listen for distress in voices, and learn background information that could assist first responders in a potentially life-threatening emergency."

Still, Commissioner Brown is very excited about the new text-to-911 technology, and the work that so many central Ohio agencies put in to make it a reality. She knows the new text-to-911 service will greatly assist the deaf community, in particular, as well as those who may be in a domestic violence situation, are hiding, or simply can't make a phone call.

Safety agencies throughout Franklin County collaborate to share 911 systems and develop partnerships to improve emergency service delivery for all Franklin County residents while simultaneously reducing implementation costs for the agencies. Dispatchers will now see text-to-911 messages in a similar fashion to what shows up on a smart-phone text chain and have the ability to text back specific questions to the sender. With this in mind, agencies jointly developed pre-programmed responses aimed to address the text emergencies they receive and quickly ask for key information.

Text-to-911 works on cell phones, tablets and other devices with the capability of sending texts. Dispatchers cannot now receive pictures or videos, but hope to make that capability available in the future. Text-to-911 service is subject to cell signal availability— another reason why those attempting to contact 911 should call when they can and text when they can't. In the event a text does not go through, the person attempting to use text-to-911 should receive an automated bounce-back message indicating the text's failure to be delivered.

"The Franklin County agencies here today are so integrated through mutual aid that we needed a unified response to this, and we all worked together very well to make it happen," said Westerville 911

Communications Manager Holly Wayt, who is also President of the Association of Public Communications Officials International, the world's oldest and largest organization of public safety communications professionals. "We all understood our collective responsibility to embrace this new technology and its public benefits. At the same time, and I can't emphasize this enough, I hope our public remembers to call if they can and text if they can't."

For more information about the new text-to-911 service, visit text911.franklincountyohio.gov.

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