

News Alert

Rensselaer County Legislature Office of the Minority 270-2892

Contact Kevin Harrington at 270-2892 or 326-1846 after 5:00 PM

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Legislator Seeks State Action on Emergency Calls to Cellular Providers

Troy—In the wake of an incident involving the murder of a Vermont woman, Rensselaer County Legislator Kevin Harrington (D), Dist 2 will ask Governor Paterson to consider support for emergency legislation requiring cellular phone service providers to disclose the name and address of any subscriber to emergency dispatchers upon demand in an effort to save lives.

Harrington noted the tragedy in Vermont with the murder of a Vermont woman, Francis Morgan, who called 911 on her cell phone screaming for help. She was unable to provide her name or address to the Emergency Dispatchers who received the call which was routed to Washington County in New York State.

Dispatchers called the phone company, Verizon Wireless in an effort to obtain the subscriber's name and address. "They were told to fill out paperwork which Verizon first faxed to them and to fax it back in order to have the information released," stated Harrington. "Those minutes lost fulfilling a bureaucratic requirement must not be repeated in another incident. We must act to require such information to be disclosed immediately upon demand by emergency dispatchers trying to save lives and provide emergency assistance."

In this instance, approximately 10 minutes were lost getting the paperwork from and back to the phone company. That's 10 minutes that the emergency dispatchers were powerless to send police to the victim's address.

While additional time was lost in State Police arriving at the home which should be investigated by those authorities, the minutes lost dealing with phone companies are completely avoidable. Harrington is asking Governor Patterson to review this incident and propose emergency legislation to allow cellular service providers to provide the name and address of any subscriber whose phone is used to request emergency assistance to 911 operators.

No one wants to see a life lost because 911 operators are filling out paperwork and faxing a request to a service provider. We all have an interest in savings lives and New York State must do the all in its power to assure the safety and security of its citizens.

Below is the story aired on WNYT CH 13

FORT EDWARD - A Vermont woman who died after being brutally beaten and shot early Saturday morning had called 911 screaming for help.

Almost two hours later police were on the scene requesting an ambulance for her lifeless body.

Despite 40-year-old Francine Morgan's frantic call, there was a breakdown in technology, which led to a breakdown in communication.

Morgan called from her home in Wells, Vermont at 3:57 a.m. The cell signal went to a tower in Granville and was received at the dispatch center in Fort Edward. But the badly beaten Morgan wasn't able to identify herself or tell dispatchers where she was.

Because she was calling from Vermont, her GPS location didn't show up on Washington County's computers. All they had was Morgan's phone number and which tower the call came in on.

As they stayed on the line with Morgan, the three dispatchers on duty went to work, desperately trying to figure out where she was calling from. They did a Google search of the number. They called Granville police and New York State Police in Granville. They called Morgan's cell phone and from her outgoing voice message determined her first name was Francine.

At 4:03, six minutes after Morgan called 911, dispatchers called Verizon, asking the company to give them the name and address of the caller. But Verizon requested that the dispatchers fill out a form and fax it to them.

"Verizon has paperwork they like completed. We had to have them fax us that paperwork, fill it out and we had to fax it back," Public Safety Director Bill Cook said.

At 4:14 the dispatcher called Verizon to say he was trying to fax the form but the fax number was busy. The Verizon operator said they had other faxes coming in and placed the dispatcher on hold.

A couple minutes later the fax went through. Ten minutes later at 4:26, 30 minutes after Morgan called 911, Verizon called dispatchers to tell them the name and address of Francine Morgan.

The Washington County dispatcher contacted Vermont State Police at 4:27. Then at 5:47, an hour and twenty minutes later and nearly two hours after she called 911, Vermont State Police were on the scene and calling for EMS. Francine Morgan was dead.

According to Washington County, it took Vermont State police nearly one hour and 20 minutes to arrive on the scene and ask for an ambulance. Vermont State Police have not returned NewsChannel 13's repeated phone calls seeking comment.