

No Override of Bellone's fire funding veto

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Suffolk lawmakers failed to override County Executive Steve Bellone's veto of a bipartisan resolution to provide \$1.8 million to local fire and emergency dispatching centers over the next five years after the county executive promised to include the money in next year's budget.

The resolution, which originally passed 14-4 -- two more than the 12 needed for an override -- only got eight votes, allowing Bellone to sustain his veto.

"We do pledge not only a budgetary solution, but to put it in local law going forward," Bellone aide Thomas Vaughan told lawmakers before the vote.

However, Legis. John Kennedy (R-Nesconset), minority leader and the bill's sponsor, urged the lawmakers to move ahead with the override because the law would "give people who save lives a degree of certainty" on their future funding.

"The climate has changed," said Legis. DuWayne Greogory (D-Amityville), co-sponsor of the original bill, who was one of the defectors on the override. "I feel comfortable they [dispatching groups] are working out an agreement with the county executive."

The measure would have required county police and the Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services to begin sharing, on a quarterly basis, at least 20 percent of revenue from a surcharge on Internet phone services with 10 local dispatching centers, which serve more than 70 towns, villages and fire districts.

The proposal came after County Comptroller Joseph Sawicki Jr. issued a report in March raising issues about how a 35-cent-per-line monthly surcharge for Enhanced 911 is distributed.

Until now, local dispatching centers have shared the surcharge for landline and cellphone calls, but not Internet phone calls.

Bellone issued a rare veto of the proposal because it did not include any offsets from the 2013 budget to pay for the move while the county is facing a \$250 million deficit.

Since then, Bellone has personally met with local fire officials -- and his aides met with them again last Friday -- and vowed to provide funding next year. Deputy County Executive Jon Schneider said he expected the side to come up with a permanent "global solution" before either budget is released in mid-September. This includes allowing the dispatcher groups to use the funds for personnel rather than just equipment and capital projects, as now permitted.