

Office of Performance Evaluations

News Release: Governance of Information Technology and Public Safety Communications

March 21, 2008

(BOISE)—On Thursday, Idaho legislators received a performance evaluation report recommending strategies and practices to improve the management of the state's information technology and public safety communications. Both IT and public safety communications require decisions involving large sums of public funds.

For example, state public safety communications managers are proposing approximately \$298 million state investment to complete the upgrade to the radio and microwave system in Idaho, allowing the first emergency responders (fire, police, and emergency medical services) to talk to each other in real time during an emergency. National events such as the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina underscore the importance of having an interoperable public safety radio system. In addition, investments in a new radio system are needed to meet the federal deadline (December 31, 2012) for changes to radio spectrum use.

The legislative evaluation office's survey of 241 local public safety agencies at the city and county level showed that a larger percentage of agencies are concerned about the absence of clear information on the development of a statewide interoperable communications system, options for local jurisdictions, and funding for the system.

The report also notes that Idaho's delivery of 911 services for its citizens is behind all but three states—only 54 percent of Idaho's population has access to 911 services that can pinpoint the location of a wireless caller. With the exception of Wyoming, all of Idaho's neighbors have better 911 service delivery.

In the area of information technology, over the last three fiscal years, the state government has spent an estimated \$428 million (3-year cumulative) on IT projects. Recent reorganizations and new management initiatives at the state level are promising steps, but much more needs to be done. For example, IT resource planning has largely been left to individual state agencies and information is not currently available to answer the following essential questions:

- How much is the state spending on information technology?
- Are information technology investments helping state agencies provide improved services to the citizens of Idaho?
- Are IT processes properly planned and coordinated to avoid duplication of effort and ensure successful projects?

Overall, the legislative report concluded

- improved leadership is needed to provide direction for IT and public safety communications planning efforts;

- planning efforts have been fragmented and state government efforts have not been well coordinated;
- large-scale IT projects should be managed like major capital projects.

The study was conducted by the Legislature's non-partisan Office of Performance Evaluations. The office receives evaluation assignments from the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee (JLOC), which has eight members and is equally divided between the two political parties and the two chambers of the Idaho Legislature. The committee is co-chaired by Senator Shawn Keough (R) of Sandpoint and Representative Margaret Henbest (D) of Boise.