

# Opinion

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## E-9-1-1

### It offers lots of promise

**T**AKE IT from Farmington Department of Public Safety Director Frank Lauhoff and Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer.

Oakland County's proposed Enhanced-9-1-1 telephone system is one of the best emergency services to come along — ever.

Says Dwyer: "It has the capability of letting us respond immediately to very dramatic, life-threatening cases: a sudden illness, a breaking and entering in progress. It has proven to be a lifesaver throughout the country."

Wisely, both Farmington and Farmington Hills have said yes to the concept of an Oakland County E-9-1-1. The projected cost to each city is small compared to the potential reward — the saving of lives and property through less confusion over where help is needed and through shorter response times.

Projections call for the Farmington area to be wired into the \$600,000 computerized telephone network within 18 months. So far, Farmington, Farmington Hills and at least 25 other Oakland County communities have approved the system conceptually. In light of the complicated options for related equipment, however, the decision-making hasn't been easy.

**BY DIALING E-9-1-1**, callers in each participating community would automatically reach the appropriate police or fire dispatcher. The number of the telephone the caller is using would automatically flash on a computer terminal in the appropriate dispatch center.

By having that number, the dispatcher — if the caller is unable to complete the call or unable to communicate directly — could pinpoint an address through standard telephone directories or Michigan Bell's security files.

That capability would be invaluable in emergencies where a caller is unable to convey a message because of illness, age or other factors. It also should ease the minds of pay-phone users. The pay phone's exact location would be given to the dispatcher via E-9-1-1.

E-9-1-1 would eliminate the chance of a panicked Farmington Hills resident calling the Farmington Department of Public Safety instead of the Farmington Hills Police.

Beyond that, display of the caller's telephone number would serve to deter prank calls.

**The projected cost to each city is small compared to the potential reward — the saving of lives and property . . .**

**EACH COMMUNITY** could add equipment or service options beyond the county's basic system. One such option, which Farmington Hills has its sights set on, allows a caller's address to appear on the dispatcher's terminal when E-9-1-1 is dialed.

The county system eventually could provide a caller's address and telephone number on the dispatcher's terminal. That service could more than double a community's costs, so its inclusion obviously would hinge on broad interest.

Under the current plan, the county would pay 100 percent of the \$600,000 rewiring cost to make the system operational countywide (\$3,700 for Farmington and \$22,000 for Farmington Hills).

The county also would pay 50 percent of the system's annual recurring maintenance fees. Participating communities would pay the rest: \$2,700 for Farmington, \$16,100 for Farmington Hills.

Each community also would have to equip its dispatch center with compatible computer equipment and any desired optional services.

**INDEED, WE** have concerns.

Cost estimates are based on all 57 Oakland County communities participating. If a significant number opted out, that could hike the cost for participants substantially. Minimal participation is highly unlikely, however.

What's more, a computer system failure could shut down some dispatchers' terminals. Those dispatchers, however, could still communicate orally with callers — exactly as they can now. So a system failure wouldn't cut off communication.

Provided the costs and complications involved with installation of the system can be met, E-9-1-1 should help reassure all residents and businesses of the county's commitment to safety.

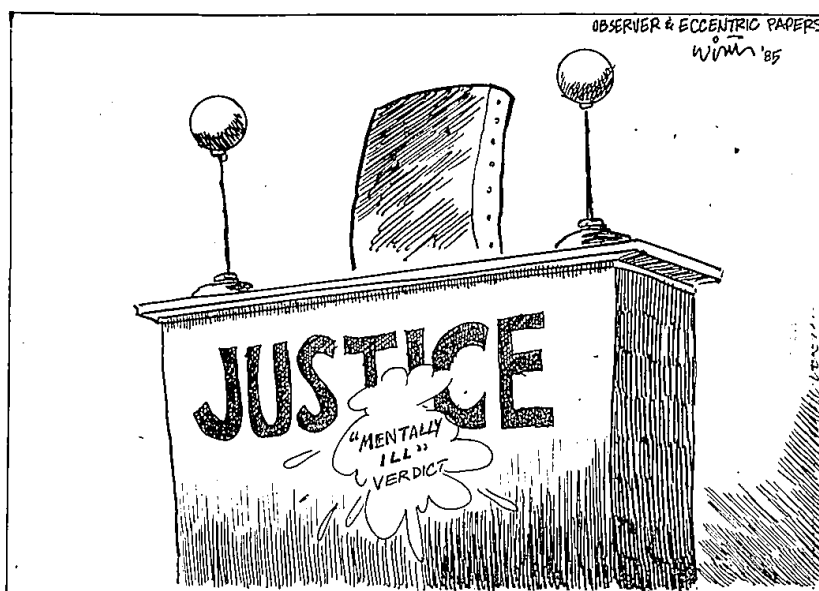
Preliminary signs point to E-9-1-1 paying for itself many times over in precious seconds saved.

— Bob Sklar



FAUJOY BORST/MIAT photograph

Dispatch coordinator Marylou Alex and dispatcher Tom Stimmel, in the Farmington Hills Police Department communications center.



## No treatment in prisons

**THE CRUNCH** has been on for some time to try to lock people up who are viewed as a danger to society. Tougher sentencing is a continual refrain. Prosecutors demand impossible bonds and complain when judges don't comply, even though our legal system specifies that the purpose of bond should be only to ensure that the accused shows up for trial.

The prison system in Michigan tries to handle the rising influx of prisoners and can't quite do it. Prisoners are shipped out the back door under early release and prison overcrowding stipulations. New inmates are taken in the front door and immediately given time off for expected good behavior.

As part of this incessant demand to lock up and punish, the Legislature several years ago passed a law that allows juries to convict mentally ill people of crimes and then send them to prison.

**ONE OF** the first cases that allowed use of the law involved a retired West Bloomfield school teacher who was convicted of a variety of offenses against two groups of women in one day. At gunpoint, he forced two women into a van in a supermarket parking lot and made them undress. Later that day he forced three women into his van, put two out and molested but did not rape the third.

Testimony indicated that the man had mental problems that required treatment.



Bob Wisler

But under the provisions of the new law, the jury found the man "guilty but mentally ill." The judge sentenced him to 12-30 years, and he was packed off to prison where he has resided since.

In a recent hearing before a Senate committee on Safe Streets, chaired by Sen. Alan Cropsey, R-Dewitt, a member of the Public Defender's office, Rolf Berg, testified to what we have long suspected — there is no treatment for prisoners found "guilty but mentally ill." Convicts sent to prison under this provision are treated no differently from other prisoners.

**THE LAW** was passed with some good intention to forestall guiltless pleas of temporary insanity and to encourage treatment for persons who are mentally ill and who have committed crimes. The alternative was to find someone not guilty by reason of insanity, temporary or otherwise, and place him or her in a mental institution.

But since the prison system has no good

system for handling mentally ill people — it could be argued that even the state mental health system has no good system — those found guilty but mentally ill are packed off to prison for the duration of their sentences and will emerge undoubtedly worse off than when they entered.

What the guilty but mentally ill verdict does do, however, is to allow juries to find someone guilty of a crime without worrying about what happens to them once they are convicted. Juries are not told that persons found guilty under this provision will receive no appreciable treatment in prison. The very tone of the verdict indicates that, indeed, something will be done.

**THE JURY** can, in effect, wash its hands of the case after reaching the verdict. The law also allows judges to do their duty without worrying about the consequences since it isn't their responsibility to provide treatment either.

The fact is, one judge said, the guilty but mentally ill verdict means only that the convict can be sentenced to prison with the recommendation that he be treated for mental illness. "We have no other place to send them," he said.

The law and its consequences are just one more example of a system that is inadequate to handle the kinds of problems that a society faces in dealing with aberrant behavior.

## Let's face illegitimacy issue

**DID YOU** ever get the feeling, in following the news, that even when the words were in English, the speaker was using a different language?

In the 1970s, a spokesman for the Nixon White House uttered the infamous "that statement is no longer operative" to indicate a previous statement had been a lie. The 1980s version is "teen pregnancy" as a cover phrase for illegitimacy.

You've read about it before in this column. Some months ago I zeroed in on Dr. Agnes Mansour, director of the Michigan Department of Social Services, publicizing her program to combat teen pregnancy. Under questioning, she allowed that, well, yeah, the problem really was illegitimacy. I was hoping to nip this mousy-mouthed jargon about teen pregnancy in the bud.

**NO SUCH** luck. The jargon seems to be catching on nationwide.

Last week's Time magazine cover story was headlined: "Children Having Children: Teen Pregnancy in America."

About 10 inches into the time article, we get to the heart of the matter: "Each year more than a million American teenagers will become pregnant, four out of five of them unmarried. Together they represent a distressing flaw in the social fabric of America."

In other words, you have to scrape through a lot of verbiage to get to the



Tim Richard

heart of the matter.

In fact, teen pregnancy isn't the problem at all. Talk to the older folks, and many will tell you their mothers and grandmothers had babies while in their teens.

In modern history, 1957 was actually the high point in the teen birth rate, according to the writers at Time. But if you look through the newspapers and news magazines of 1957, you'll find hardly a mention of teen pregnancy as a social problem.

The 1950 teen illegitimate birth rate was 15 percent; today it's more than half and, in some areas, 80 percent.

**THE SOCIAL** consequences of the illegitimate birth rate in America are appalling. Some examples:

- Because young mothers-to-be wait so long to get medical attention, their babies' birth weight and health are apt to suffer.
- Later in life, those children run into emotional and educational problems.

- For a variety of reasons — the mother's inexperience, her boyfriend's carelessness or insobriety — those children are more likely to be abused.

- Somewhere between 40 and 50 percent of those out-of-wedlock pregnancies will be terminated by abortions. In Michigan and a small number of other states, the taxpayers will get the bill.

- Any single mother has a rough economic road, but the teen-ager bearing a child out of wedlock has it the roughest of all. Moreover, we are witnessing what a Detroit paper last summer labeled a "family tradition" — three generations of teen mothers, all out of wedlock, all on welfare.

**SOLUTIONS?** Some say it's sex education; others say there's too much sex education. Some say welfare is an immensely powerful inducement for girls with poor economic prospects to get pregnant and keep the babies; others say welfare is only humane.

Educate . . . teach morality . . . provide jobs . . . sterilize . . . make the father pay . . . make the grandparents pay. Ask a million Americans and you'll get a million solutions.

I say we won't even begin to get solutions until we define the problem correctly, and the problem isn't "teen pregnancy."