

Date: February 25, 2005

To: Council Member Dan Nizolek, Chair PS & RS Committee
Council Member Don Samuels
Council Member Sandy Colvin Roy
Council Member Barbara Johnson
Council President Paul Ostrow
Council Member Paul Zerby

Fm: Jill Kielblock, Business Representative
AFSCME Council 5

Re: Potential Move of Minneapolis Emergency Communications Services to Hennepin County

As I prepare this document, I do not know what the Staff Report to you will advise but AFSCME asks that you consider the following points which I summarize below and go into in more detail in the attachment.

Your resolution includes the clause that “the City of Minneapolis is committed to the continuing employment of MECC employees in any future Emergency Communication Center serving Minneapolis.”

1. The Hennepin County Sheriff and Labor Relations Department have indicated as initial positions that Minneapolis ECC employees would not transferred as a group but have to apply and be selected as new Hennepin County employees.
2. The majority of the City’s thirty-six (36) 911 Operators likely would not meet the minimum qualifications of the County’s Sheriff’s Telecommunicator position and so not have an opportunity for selection by the Sheriff.

Even if such a transfer would be able to be negotiated, significant issues would remain relating to wages, seniority, benefits, and pensions.

1. Any transferred or selected employees would be subject to the terms of a collective bargaining agreement between the County and Teamsters 320.
2. Wages for the County positions both start and top out lower than the City positions.
3. City employees would start with no seniority (currently nearly half of the AFSCME ECC employees have at least 10 years of service with 12 having twenty or more years)
4. Senior city employees have higher vacation accrual rates than County employees.

5. Per Hennepin County Personnel rules, benefits do not transfer so the City would be liable for payment of any accrued vacation and sick leave balances and the employees themselves would move with no balances on the books.
6. A few ECC employees participate in MERF and their continued ability to do so would potentially be at risk unless the County was willing to negotiate their ability to do so.

AFSCME ECC employees have concerns beyond their own employment. They truly believe that the safety of the citizens, police officers, and fire fighters must come first.

1. Can the County truly provide the same level of service?
2. Will the citizens of Minneapolis and visitors to Minneapolis be as safe?
3. Will the Police Officers that rely on the current level of service be as safe?
4. Will there be dedicated lines for our Fire Department or will the safety of the Fire Fighters be compromised?

AFSCME believes that a move of Minneapolis ECC services to Hennepin County is simply the wrong thing to do. While we do not doubt that the County Call Center provides good service, we do not believe it can match the very high caliber of service now being provided which is dedicated to the safety and security of the citizens of Minneapolis and the first responders. We believe such a move would seriously compromise that safety and security. In addition, we believe that such a move does put the continued employment of many current Minneapolis ECC staff at risk.

Please feel free to contact me by e-mail at Jill.Kielblock@afscmemn.org or by phone at 651-287-0579 to discuss AFSCME's concerns in more detail.

Xc: Ken Ziegler, Local 9 President
ECC Staff
Council Member Natalie Johnson Lee
Council Member Lisa Goodman
Council Member Gary Schif
Council Member Barret Lane
MECC Director John Dejung

Jerry Serfling, Field Services Director
Mayor R.T. Rybak
Council Member Dean Zimmerman
Council Vice-President Robert Lilligren
Council Member Scott Benson
City Coordinator John Moir
Employee Services Director Tim Giles

**AFSCME COUNCIL 5, LOCAL 9 POSITION REALTED TO THE POTENTIAL MOVE
OF MINNEAPOLIS EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS SERVICES TO HENNEPIN
COUNTY**

The intent of this memo is to express the concerns of the Union and its members about the potential move of Minneapolis Emergency Communication services to Hennepin County. As a Union representative I am extremely concerned about the potential negative impact on our members. While the members are concerned about their future, they also have reservations about the impact of such a move on the safety and welfare of the citizens of Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Police Officers and Minneapolis Firefighters.

The Union appreciates the clause in your resolution which stated that “the City of Minneapolis is committed to the continuing employment of MECC employees in any future Emergency Communication Center serving Minneapolis.” However, at a February 11th meeting, representatives of the Sheriff made it clear that any Minneapolis ECC employees would have to apply for any new positions created by the County as a result of this move and that they would have to start as new employees. Initial discussion with the County’s Labor Relations Department indicates the same. Teamsters 320 representatives indicated that even if there was an agreement to simply move the employees with the work they could not bring their current wages or seniority with them.

Hennepin County Personnel Rules (Rule 8.8) indicates that employees selected for transfer from another employer “...shall be granted all the privileges of other employees in the classified service and shall be required to serve the probationary period stated for the class. Except where legislated, no benefits from employment in other jurisdictions may be transferred to the County.”

If the County holds to their position, there is no way the clause in your resolution indicating a commitment to continuing employment of MECC employees can be met.

The AFSCME staff at the Minneapolis ECC consists of thirty-six (36) 911 Operators and thirty-eight (38) Police/Fire Dispatchers. The County’s current job classification of Sheriff’s Telecommunicator requires “one year of experience dispatching police, firefighters or emergency medical services OR two years of other dispatching experience OR completion of an approved 9-1-1/Dispatch Certificate program; OR four years of experience as a first responder (police officer, firefighter, or emergency medical technician/paramedic); OR an approved equivalent combination of training and experience.” While the City’s Police/Fire Dispatchers certainly meet the County’s minimum requirements, it is doubtful that the majority of the City’s 9-1-1 Operators would. The requirements for the Operator position require the ability to type 35 words per minute, high school graduation or the equivalent, 18 years of age by the date of hire, and ability to work up to 12 hours continuously wearing a headset. The duties of the Operator do not include dispatching duties. At first glance then almost half of the AFSCME ECC employees would not meet the minimum qualifications for the County position and therefore be laid off from their City positions without the ability to continue the work that they are now doing.

Nearly half of the AFSCME ECC employees have been with the City for at least ten (10) years with twelve (12) individuals having twenty (20) or more years of service. To say that if these

City employees are lucky enough to be selected by the Sheriff to do their own work they would start with zero seniority in Hennepin County is simply wrong. Yet the Teamsters 320 contract with Hennepin County would say that is what would happen and their initial position is that they don't see any interest in negotiating a plan where City employees could carry over their seniority and merge it with the current County employees.

The wage range for the City's 911 Operators is \$16.416 at Step 1 to \$22.463 at the top step. The wage range for the City's Police Fire Dispatchers is \$18.396 at Step 1 to \$24.881 at the top step. The wage range from the County's Telecommunicators is \$15.583 at the Minimum and \$23.40 at the Maximum. Although the County's Labor Relations Department has indicated that any City employee hired would likely be placed on the County's pay schedule with some credit for time served in the City's ECC, many of the City's employees moving to the County would be forced to take a pay cut to continue to perform their own work.

Given the County Personnel Rule that transferred employees cannot transfer benefits, the City would be liable to pay the employee for any accrued vacation and sick leave balances they may have on the books when the transfer takes place. In the event the County is willing to negotiate on the transfer of balances, the City would likely have to provide the County with funding for those transferred balances. In addition senior employees would face a reduced accrual rate at the County. There is also a difference in vacation rates with the City's more senior employees accruing one (1) day more per year at eighteen (18) years of service and three (3) more days per year at twenty-one (21) or more years of service than their counterparts at Hennepin County. In addition the maximum accrual would be reduced from four hundred (400) hours to two hundred eighty (280) hours.

While likely few in number, there is also a concern about those City employees that now participate in MERF. The City and County would certainly need to address the ability of those employees to continue in MERF if they are hired by the County.

Beyond the immediate employment concerns that are the purview of the Union, many of the AFSCME ECC members have expressed concern about the impact of such a move on the citizens of Minneapolis and the Minneapolis Police Officers and Fire Fighters. These concerns are perhaps best expressed in an e-mail that ECC Dispatcher and AFSCME Steward Irene Philips sent to Council Member Barbara Johnson. I believe Council Member Johnson was going to forward her concerns to you but I believe they are worth repeating here:

"Some other issues outside of the walls of MECC are the quality of service the citizens will get. The larger picture is the safety of the people within the city whether they be citizens or visitors. People who work at MECC have spent time and training to learn the geography of the city specifically. Being the largest city in the 5 state area makes MECC different than other communication centers and there are specific needs and services that have become part of the daily operations here at MECC.

For instance, the level of service we provide to citizens. I have never heard of any neighboring cities that will provide the level of service the citizens of Minneapolis are fortunate enough to have, by simple knowledge of the geography of the city. With cell phones becoming an integral

part of daily lives, there are plenty of times when we get calls from people who are not residents and may not be familiar with their surroundings. I have witnessed on several occasions when an operator will just by the caller describing buildings they see around them, be able to get determine the location of the caller. Hence getting them the help they are in need of without time delay.

The safety of officers. This is a primary concern for dispatchers. The level of service we provide to the hardworking officers is unparalleled in Minnesota. From channel 7 which monitors off duty numbers and locations, to the dispatcher who has a channel that can by one blip of an open mike determine there is a officer in trouble and get help the location without hesitation, has saved lives and its known how the officers appreciate the professionalism of their dispatchers. We are the unseen safety net officers can rely on, they know we have their backs covered and that their safety is our primary concern. Once again the knowledge of the city and its layout comes into play. Say an incident occurs where a perimeter needs to be set up. Knowing our city well is a huge asset in a situation such as this, time is of the essence. Time and time again we meet any challenge that has been laid before us many times without having a chance to absorb what's going on, a split second can turn things into chaos and the professionalism that is standard here has saved countless lives. Most times people never know about the person who probably saved their lives.

The dedication to the Fire Dept. The firefighters have been a big part of our services also. Dispatching them to scenes, making their notifications, contacting Red Cross and working with them to get help to citizens who may have been displaced and need shelter. Working hand in hand with the Chiefs who physically come down to MECC during major events to help coordinate any relocations of Fire rigs and make certain the rest of the city is well covered in the event of a fire or medical emergency.

I could go on about what we do here at MECC. I truly believe the people sitting in the position of decision are not fully aware of the integral part we play providing service to residents and visitors. If they did, they would not even have considered someone else caring for the citizens, visitors, police officers, firefighters. People who have no vested interest in the safety of the city in particular because they may be working on something for Golden Valley or another of their cities they provide service for, Minneapolis public safety will just sit on a back burner because another city has the attention of its dispatchers. This to me is horribly frightening considering the potential for terrorism in this day and age.

Bottom line is the safety of this city will seriously compromised by letting our public safety be taken over by the county who doesn't have the commitment nor the professionals that know the layout of the city. The citizens will be the first to suffer from the takeover with less service, less commitment because they will become just part of the job that serves lots of cities, who cares where your from. I remain uninformed as to what is going on, no one who actually does the job was invited by management to be on the study team, thus keeping employees even more in the dark. It behooves me to think people are sitting at a table making decisions and having discussions with no one is actually performing the job sitting at the table. This is very confusing to me. At what price do we decide public safety is worth it. Saving a some money may look nice on paper but in reality if I or someone I love needs to call 911 for a life and death situation I

sure hope someone who truly cares and understands life in the "big" city will be on the other end of that phone. The amount of excess management in this department could be cut in half and a huge saving not to mention elimination of many problems would be taken care of. Many things can be done to improve the fiscal outlook here, not throwing the citizens, firefighters and police officers safety to an agency that already has its hands full with other cities."

Finally, I am going to express our concern about the fact that until very recently the Union and its members have been shut out of these discussions.

When AFSCME became aware of Hennepin County's offer to provide emergency communication services to cities within the boundaries of Hennepin County having independent centers in late October 2004, we immediately contacted City Coordinator John Moir and MECC Director John Dejung with a request that AFSCME be represented in any discussions during which the City considered such a move. Mr. Moir's prompt response indicated that he acknowledged the request and the City's response was likely to be a suggestion of further discussions with the County beyond the County's November 30, 2004 deadline.

Unfortunately our next information about the potential move came not through Mr. Moir or Mr. Dejung or being included in any discussions but rather through a review of the November 4, 2004 PS & RS Agenda where a resolution was passed indicating that Hennepin County would be told that the City was interested but wanted to do an evaluative study in 2005 before giving a final answer to the County's offer. Once again, the Union asked for representation on the group that would be doing this evaluative study. Our request for participation was ignored on the basis that "staff" needed to do a more thorough analysis before knowing if there would be any issues of interest to the Union to discuss. Evidently the definition of "staff" excluded line staff who actually perform the emergency communication services and "staff" knows more about what issues would be of interest to the Union than the Union does itself.

It was not until late January 2005 when I was notified by Mr. Dejung that I would be invited to a meeting to discuss labor concerns. That meeting of Hennepin County Sheriff Department and Human Resources Department representatives, Teamsters 320 representatives (that Local represents the Telecommunicators in Hennepin County and the EEC Supervisors in the City), John Dejung, Tim Giles, MPEA representatives and AFSCME representatives occurred on February 11th. A second meeting was scheduled to take place on February 24th but was cancelled due to lack of advance notice so several key representatives would have been unable to attend. This meeting is currently being rescheduled.

In addition, AFSCME met with the Mayor, Council President Ostrow, and City Coordinator staff on February 15th.

The bottom line for the Union is that our invitation to participate in discussions has come too late and been defined as restricted to "labor" issues. We have not had the opportunity through the members we represent who actually do the work to give input into any of the decisions about whether or not this move is the best for the citizens of the City of Minneapolis.

Based on the internal discussions that we have had AFSCME believes that moving Minneapolis ECC services to Hennepin County would be the wrong thing to do. Such a move would negatively impact the citizens of Minneapolis, the Minneapolis Police Officers and Fire Fighters, and certainly the current employees of the Minneapolis ECC. AFSCME believes that a move of Minneapolis ECC services to Hennepin County is simply the wrong thing to do. While we do not doubt that the County Call Center provides good service, we do not believe it can match the very high caliber of service now being provided which is dedicated to the safety and security of the citizens of Minneapolis and the first responders. We believe such a move would seriously compromise that safety and security. In addition, we believe that such a move does put the continued employment of many current Minneapolis ECC staff at risk.