



# TACIR

The Tennessee Advisory Commission  
on Intergovernmental Relations



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## ***MEMORANDUM***

**TO:** Commission Members

**FROM:** Cliff Lippard  
Executive Director

**DATE:** 28 September 2023

**SUBJECT:** Senate Bill 2827/House Bill 2729 (Emergency Communications on College and University Campuses)—Draft Report for Review and Comment

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The attached Commission report is submitted for your review and comment. It was prepared in response to Senate Bill 2827 by Senator Hensley and House Bill 2729 by Representative Ogles, which were introduced in the 112<sup>th</sup> General Assembly and, as amended, directed the Commission to perform a comprehensive evaluation of the routing and storage of emergency communications on the campuses of colleges and universities in Tennessee, including

- the ability of institutions to
  - store data and recordings relating to emergency communications and
  - store and retrieve complaints of criminal activity alleged to have occurred on campus and
- best policies and procedures, and consistency of messaging in this state, with respect to improving the ability of colleges and universities to store data and recordings relating to emergency communications.

Lawmakers noted that some schools direct students (and staff) to call campus police or security departments for emergencies instead of 911. But some campus police or security departments in Tennessee don't record incoming calls reporting crimes or other incidents on campus. This contrasts with 911 calls answered by outside dispatchers, which are always recorded and saved. The bills' sponsors expressed concern that not recording and saving calls that report crimes could hinder investigations or lead to schools underreporting incidents on their campuses.

In response to these concerns, staff has identified alternatives intended to improve institutions' handling of emergency calls and help make parents and students more informed and aware of potential safety risks on college and university campuses:

- According to interviews and a survey of public and private institutions by Commission staff, many institutions in Tennessee already record calls to their campus police or security departments, including nearly all the state's public universities. But none of the community colleges and few private institutions said they currently record incoming calls, though most private schools direct students and faculty to dial 911 for all emergencies. Stakeholders said it would likely not be "a heavy burden" to begin recording calls to campus police, though "there would certainly be some cost."

Although the Commission staff found no evidence of higher crime rates or other public safety issues at colleges and universities that don't record calls to their campus police and security departments, recordings of those calls could help police with investigations, help ensure compliance with federal and state crime-reporting requirements and protect institutions in case of disputes over the facts of a report. For these reasons, **the Commission recommends the state encourage colleges and universities to record and retain recordings of calls reporting crimes and conduct violations to campus police and security departments by providing additional funding to help postsecondary institutions obtain or improve emergency call recording systems.**

- Federal and state laws require colleges and universities to report statistics and other information about crime and safety on campus. However, studies have shown that less than half of violent crimes get reported to police, meaning reported crime statistics only capture a portion of victimizations. For many reasons, victims of sexual assault in particular are hesitant to report their assailants to authorities. A recent survey of students across 383 colleges and universities nationwide revealed that 14% of respondents had experienced unwanted sexual contact but only 6% of those victims told campus or local police.

In addition to or in lieu of reporting sexual misconduct to law enforcement, victims can seek protection and disciplinary action through policies established by their institution under Title IX. This federal law requires schools to "adopt and publish grievance procedures for students to file complaints of sex discrimination, including complaints of sexual harassment or sexual violence." However, at most schools, the number of these cases is not published alongside

crime statistics. Some institutions—including the University of Tennessee system—report them voluntarily, but the federal government does not require colleges and universities to publish Title IX statistics, and only three states—Louisiana, Maryland, and New York—require schools to report this information.

Giving parents and students more information about misconduct on campus can help them make more informed choices. To supplement the crime statistics already required to be reported under federal and state law, **the Commission recommends that the General Assembly require colleges and universities in Tennessee to publish to their websites annual statistics for complaints of sexual misconduct and assault reported to their campus Title IX authorities.**

- Campus crime statistics reported under federal and state law also exclude many incidents that occur off campus. Studies have found college students are more likely to be victims of violent crime off campus than on campus, and as one news story put it, “parents don’t draw the distinction between on-campus and off-campus crime if their child is the victim.”

Law enforcement agencies around the state, including those with jurisdictions over or adjacent to college campuses, use the same system to report crimes and their locations to the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation. To provide parents and students with access to more information about crimes on and in the immediate vicinity of college campuses, **the Commission recommends that the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation include statistics for crimes reported within one half mile of each college or university campus—a generally accepted walking distance—in its annual *Crime on Campus* reports and that colleges and universities publish to their websites the statistics for their institutions from this report, which they are already required to make available upon request.**