

# **LEAD DEBATE ON THE BILL FOR AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR A NATIONWIDE TOLL-FREE EMERGENCY NUMBER TO IMPLEMENT A NATIONAL SYSTEM OF REPORTING EMERGENCIES AND FOR OTHER RELATED MATTERS**

## **PREAMBLE**

The Nationwide Toll- Free Emergency Number Bill seeks to prescribe primary emergency telephone numbers for use in the country, and to implement a nationwide system for the reporting of emergencies to emergency service providers. The Bill was first read on the floor of the Senate on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2016

According to the Wikipedia, emergency telephone number is a special case in a country's telephone number plan. Emergency numbers are needed in life threatening situations. They can also be used to report emergencies of various types, such as road accident, fire, burglary, medical emergencies and so on.

Usually emergency telephones are set- up so that once a call is made, it must be answered. And should that caller abandon the call, the line may still be held until the emergency service answers or releases the call. An emergency telephone number call may also be answered by either a telephone operator or an emergency service dispatcher.

Emergency dispatchers are trained to control the calls in order to provide help in an appropriate manner; they can also be assisted by Computer aided call handling system. The dispatcher may find it necessary to give urgent advice in life threatening situations. Some dispatchers

have special training in telling people how to perform first aid or CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitations)

In many parts of the world, an emergency service can identify the telephone number that a call has been placed from. This is normally done by applying the system that the telephone companies use to bill calls, making the numbers visible even for users who have unlisted numbers or who block caller identification. For an individual fixed land line, the caller's number can often be associated with the caller's address and therefore, their location. With the latest enhanced systems, such as the enhanced 911 codes, emergency telephone numbers are able to provide physical location of mobile telephones. And these are often specifically mandated in a country's enabling Legislation.

### **BRIEF HISTORY OF EMERGENCY TELEPHONE**

The direct dial emergency number system was first deployed in London in July 1937 using the code 999. The implementation of 911 services in the USA was gradual and haphazard.

The service evolved through governmental and jurisdictional boundary challenges in addition to inadaptability of switching equipment. With multiplicity of exchanges having different emergency numbers, finding the telephone number for a local exchange in times of emergencies became cumbersome.

Gradually these problems were overcome with 'Smart' or 'enhanced' 911 system development, not only to display callers number and address at dispatch centres, but also configured to automatically route calls to the correct

dispatch centre, regardless of what central office the caller was served from.

In 1980 the number 911 was adopted as the standard number across most of the US under the North American Numbering Plan.

In the US the Federal Communication Commission now requires network providers to route every mobile phone and pay phone calls to an emergency service call centre, including phones that have never had service or whose service has lapsed.

The EU adopted the '112' number as a standard on July 1991. And this works in parallel with other local emergency numbers in about 2/3 of the EU states.

India formerly had several help line numbers for police, medical emergencies and so on without a unified response system like the US and the EU in earlier times. According to the **Hindustantimes**, an e-paper, India's national emergency response number, on the lines of 911 became operational in 2014. The toll free number is a single point of contact for assistance in case of any kind of emergency.

In Nigeria, Lagos state alone has several toll free emergency numbers for police, ambulance, fire service , LASTMA, KAI, LASEMA, Women Abuse Domestic Violence helpline, Child Abuse Helpline and Flying Doctors (Air Ambulance & Medical Crews). Recently it was reported that the FRSC acquired "122" code from Airtel as its toll-free emergency line for public use in addition to other 12 - digits emergency line.

## **THE BILL**

The Bill essentially seeks to establish efficient and effective emergency response system. It proposes the use of "911" as a national emergency number; while the telecom service providers under the supervision of the NCC are expected to enable their networks for integration with the response service.

A nationwide system for reporting emergencies would dispense with the multiplicity of emergency numbers; and provide a single point contact for assistance in case of any kind of emergency. Calls or text messages sent will land at the nearest public safety answering point or the control room for necessary secondary responses.

The Bill enables the Nigeria Communications Commission to make regulations generally and particularly with respect to standards, locations and coverage area for primary and secondary public safety answering points.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Bill clearly intervenes to facilitate emergency response system in the country by coordinating the response numbers for effective administration and management. It has no financial implication.

Distinguished Senators are hereby invited to support the second reading of the Bill.

Thank you.