

Cell use pinching phone tax

By Ryan Clark

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Fewer landlines lowers funding of dispatch system

HIGHLAND HEIGHTS – Cell phone users are not paying county taxes, and the landline phone users who do pay may need to shell out more money to make up for it, Campbell County officials said Tuesday.

Campbell County's Consolidated Dispatch Center could be facing a money crisis due to increased cell phone use, officials told state Sen. Katie Stine at the county's Fiscal Court Mayors'

meeting Tuesday.

Stine, the Republican from Fort Thomas, listened as Campbell County Administrator Robert Horine described how the dispatch center – which began in 1999 after the merging of the three county dispatches – based its funding on a monthly \$2 landline phone tax.

According to the county representatives, national experts gave their opinion that landline phone use would in-

crease 3 percent annually, giving the county a healthy sum to pay for the dispatch center for years to come.

"I don't remember anyone (talking about) wireless phones," Campbell County Judge-executive Steve Penderly said at Tuesday's meeting, held at the Campbell County Extension Center.

Now that residents have begun to adopt cell phones, landline phone usage has continued to decrease, leav-

ing the county with its lowest monthly collection since 2001 – less than \$80,000, reported last week.

And cell phone charges, which amount to about 70 cents per line, are regulated and collected by the state.

"It creates challenges for the continued funding of the program," Horine said.

There is enough money left in reserve funds to continue the program until the 2007 fiscal year, Horine said.

But officials are wondering now how to solve the problem for the future.

Raising taxes on landlines is a possible answer, Penderly said, although he doubted it would work because landlines could be eliminated completely.

"Who knows where technology goes in the future?" he said.

"It's really tough for us to solve if we don't get something done in the legislative

session."

Boone County, which has a similar consolidated dispatch, has not reported any financial problems, said dispatch manager Chris Ferguson.

"We made payroll, and we're working on budget," he said. "We haven't had any problems yet."

But the Boone dispatch receives a little more than \$2 million in additional funding from the county's general fund and the city of Florence.

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