

Alabama proposes law enforcement technology fund

The Alabama State Legislature is currently considering a bill that proposes adding a \$10 technology fee to court costs in Chilton County; the fee is aimed at offset the rising technology costs of local law enforcement agencies; local police departments are struggling to comply with state mandates that require local agencies to electronically file tickets and other reports; the state has not provided funding to help departments pay for the operation and maintenance of computer systems; if the fee had been in place last year, it would have generated approximately \$90,000

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According to Clanton Sergeant Neil Fetner, who operates in Chilton County, the state has mandated that local police departments electronically file tickets and other reports, but has not provided funding to help departments comply with these demands.

Fetner said, "Over the years, the state of Alabama has started to enforce mandatory reporting requirements on law enforcement agencies across the state. We've had to put in a lot of information technology."

Clanton received grants to help offset the costs of installing new computers, databases, and software, but the grants did not include funding to help pay for maintenance contracts, software upgrades, and eventual hardware replacement.

Once the computers were put in place, there was "no money the grants to sustain that project from that point forward," Fetner said.

If the proposed legislation is passed, the new technology fund would help pay for the maintenance and operation of these computer databases.

The bill would add the \$10 fee to all criminal and traffic cases in Chilton County when an individual is found guilty.

Money from the fund would be collected from the county's district attorney's office, who would disburse the money to each law enforcement agency in the county based on the number of full-time officers in a particular department.

Fetner estimates that if the fee had been in place last year, it would have generated approximately \$90,000.

The legislation prohibits the funds from being used to pay for salaries or employee benefits and can only be used for "legitimate law enforcement technology or communication purposes."