

Anchorage Fire Department

Matthew Carlson | Firefighter Paramedic | Fire Station 4 |
[REDACTED]

March 2026

House Labor and Commerce Committee:

I am writing this letter in support of House Joint Resolution No. 38 urging the Alaska State Legislature and the United State Congress to recognize public safety telecommunicators as first responders by passing the Enhancing Fire Response Act.

My name is Matthew Carlson, and I am a firefighter/paramedic for Anchorage Fire Department and an Executive Board Member for Anchorage Firefighters Local 1264.

As a Firefighter/Paramedic at Anchorage Fire Department, I fully rely on our dispatchers for every 911 response for timely, accurate, and calm guidance. They are truly our first responders; answering the phone and delivering life-saving instructions before police and fire arrive. Our dispatchers can quickly calm people experiencing the worst day of their lives, obtain an accurate address and critical details, give instructions, and coordinate police and fire within a few minutes of receiving the call. Patient outcome and my safety as a frontline responder is directly affected by our dispatchers.

Anchorage Dispatchers are trained to a similar level as our firefighter/EMTs that are physically responding to an emergency. The difference is that our dispatchers can utilize their skills and training over the phone. Dispatchers are able to coach bystanders through CPR, deliver babies, control severe bleeding, and provide emotional assurance until physical help arrives.

Moving toward a First Responder classification is more than just a name change. It provides access to new training opportunities, grant opportunities for Alaska Dispatch Centers, access to wellness resources, and opportunities to enhanced retirement benefits. This resolution will make it clear to The United States Congress that the State of Alaska supports our telecommunicators and understands that they are the FIRST responders.

I rely on our dispatchers every day while I'm at work and feel safer living in Anchorage knowing how excellent our dispatchers are. I respectfully urge you to support House Joint Resolution No. 38. This is a meaningful first step in reclassifying and honoring our dispatchers for the life-saving role they play in our communities but ultimately relies at the State Level to make tangible changes. We have the opportunity to continue this momentum with HB 234.

Best Regards,



Matthew Carlson
Firefighter/Paramedic

Station 4, C-shift

Anchorage Fire Department
100 E. 4th Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99501

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



MATCOM Public Safety
Dispatch Center
City of Wasilla



1800 E. Parks Hwy.
Wasilla, AK 99654

www.cityofwasilla.gov

March 4, 2026

Representative Kevin McCabe
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska

RE: Support for HJR 38 – Recognition of Public Safety Telecommunicators as First Responders

Dear Representative McCabe,

I am writing to express strong support for House Joint Resolution 38, which urges the Alaska legislators to recognize public safety telecommunicators as first responders and to pass the Enhancing First Response Act.

Public safety telecommunicators are the first point of contact in nearly every emergency. Before a law enforcement officer, firefighter, or paramedic arrives on scene, a dispatcher has already answered the call, assessed the situation, provided life-saving instructions, and coordinated the response. They are truly the “first” first responders in the public safety system.

In emergency communications centers across Alaska, dispatchers manage critical incidents, support responders in the field, and provide reassurance and direction to callers who may be experiencing the most traumatic moments of their lives. These professionals receive specialized training in emergency communications and emergency medical dispatch protocols, enabling them to provide immediate assistance that can directly impact survival outcomes.

Despite the critical role they play in emergency response, public safety telecommunicators remain federally classified as clerical workers rather than protective service personnel. This classification does not reflect the realities of the job and limits access to many of the benefits and recognitions afforded to other first responders.

Reclassification would more accurately acknowledge the essential role telecommunicators play in public safety, while also supporting recruitment, retention, and workforce sustainability in emergency communications centers across the country. Alaska, like many states, faces increasing challenges in staffing and retaining trained dispatch professionals. Recognition as first responders would help strengthen this vital workforce.

Every emergency response begins with a voice on the other end of the line. Recognizing public safety telecommunicators as first responders affirms their role as a critical component of the emergency response system and honors the life-saving work they perform every day.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue and for supporting the professionals who serve as the first link in the chain of survival for our communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Criqui

Lori Ann Criqui
MATCOM Communications Manager
City of Wasilla

House Labor and Commerce Committee,

My name is Sarah Kueber, and I have been with the Anchorage Fire Department as a public safety communicator (911 dispatcher) for 6 years. I'm writing in support of House Joint Resolution 38 encouraging the Federal House to pass the Enhancing First Response Act to recognize public safety communicators as first responders. Doing so would give us access to wellness resources, grants, and better retirement.

Prior to my employment as a 911 dispatcher, I likely would not have understood why public safety communicators should be considered first responders as I did not have a true understanding of the job. I am hoping this letter gives some insight into what we do and why it's important to be considered first responders and have access to the benefits that come with it.

At the Anchorage Fire Department, public safety communicators triage the call, dispatch the appropriate help, then provide 911 callers with emergency instructions over the phone, all within just a few minutes. These instructions include walking a caller through CPR on a loved one, giving bleeding control instructions to slow or stop the bleed, instructing a parent to perform the Heimlich Maneuver on their choking child, coaching a mother through childbirth, giving instructions for an individual trapped in a structure fire, assisting a person trapped in a vehicle after a rollover, and many more. All of this occurs prior to EMS arrival and from our desks. It is imperative that we respond to the information given to us and provide these instructions as emergencies do not "pause" and wait for someone to arrive on scene.

Unlike those responding to the scene, we do not know what's happening before we are needed to (verbally) respond and act. When we hit the answer button we must be prepared for anything. While we are trained to remain calm and take control of the emergency, it is nearly impossible to avoid the heart rate spike that comes with the wailing, screaming, and panic that is heard from the other end of the line. It is human nature to feel sympathy for the situation unraveling, oftentimes the caller's worst day of their life. Additionally, dispatchers do not receive closure. Once the call has ended and on-scene responders take over, that is the end for us. Did we access the situation correctly? Did we help with the situation? Did the patient survive? We. Don't. Know. This stress takes a toll and compounds throughout the 12, 16, or 18 hour shift we are working, and over the years. Being trained for it does not mean we don't take it home with us and although our job is not physically demanding, the mental toll is incomprehensible.

This is more than just a name change to us. This is the first step towards an official reclassification that would give us access to wellness resources that could help us manage the mental load, grants for training opportunities and/or equipment that will allow us to provide better service to the public, and a better retirement that lines up with other first responders.

Best,

Sarah

Letter in Strong Support of HJR 38 – Recognition of Public Safety Telecommunicators as First Responders

From Roper, Jessica [REDACTED]
Date Wed 3/4/2026 8:07 AM
To Maya Narang <[REDACTED]>

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Jessica Roper. I have served as a public safety dispatcher in Alaska for seven years. Prior to becoming a dispatcher, I worked for eight years in the field as a volunteer and paid EMT, firefighter, and then paramedic in the State of Alaska. I am writing in strong support of House Joint Resolution 38, urging Congress to recognize public safety telecommunicators as first responders and to pass the Enhancing First Response Act.

Having worked both in the field and behind the headset, I have experienced firsthand how critical dispatchers are to emergency response. Public safety telecommunicators are the first point of contact in nearly every emergency. We are the calm voice guiding CPR before medics arrive, the steady presence gathering critical scene information while law enforcement is en route, and the lifeline connecting citizens in crisis to the help they desperately need. Long before lights and sirens are seen or heard, dispatchers are actively managing the scene.

During my time as an EMT, firefighter, and paramedic, the information provided by dispatch directly affected my safety and the outcome for my patients. Accurate call notes, pre-arrival instructions, and situational awareness were not clerical tasks — they were life-saving tools. Now, as a dispatcher, I understand the weight of those first moments from the other side. Seconds matter. The decisions made during those initial calls can mean the difference between life and death.

Unlike many other first responders, dispatchers often carry the weight of traumatic incidents without closure. We hear the fear, the chaos, the final breaths. We stay on the line through violence, suicide, child emergencies, and life-threatening medical calls. Yet under the current federal classification system, public safety

telecommunicators are labeled as clerical workers. This misclassification fails to reflect the reality, responsibility, and psychological toll of the profession.

Reclassifying public safety telecommunicators as a protective service occupation is not symbolic — it is necessary. It supports recruitment and retention in a profession that is chronically understaffed and emotionally demanding. It acknowledges the mental health impact of this work. Most importantly, it affirms that public safety cannot function without dispatchers.

After fifteen years combined in emergency services — both in the field and in dispatch — I can say without hesitation that public safety telecommunicators are first responders. We may not be physically on scene, but we are present in every crisis from the very first second.

I respectfully urge support for HJR 38 and for swift passage of the Enhancing First Response Act.

Thank you for your consideration and for recognizing the critical role public safety telecommunicators serve in our communities.

Respectfully,

Jessica Roper

Public Safety Dispatcher - SPSCC

Soldotna, Alaska

Jessica Roper

Public Safety Dispatcher I

Soldotna Public Safety Communications Center



Kenai Peninsula Borough

144 N. Binkley St. Soldotna, AK 99669

kpb.us

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Kyle Hall
Police Dispatcher - ENP
March 2026

Dear House Labor and Commerce Committee:

I am writing this letter in support of House Bill 234 along with House Joint Resolution No.38, and I urge the Alaska State Legislature as well as the United State Congress to formally recognize public safety telecommunicators as first responders. I am speaking on behalf of myself and not the Anchorage Police Department of Municipality as a whole.

My name is Kyle Hall; I am a 911 telecommunicator and police dispatcher for the Anchorage Police Department. I am entering my 9th year dispatching within 911, and I can confidently say that dispatchers are the “first” first responders.

Throughout my career, I have seen and heard my fellow first responders respond to calls and serve the public and be recognized for doing so, but so often dispatch is left behind in that recognition. Law Enforcement gets rewards for heroic acts, firefighters for saving lives, Paramedics for delivering critical care. Yet dispatch, the professionals who answered the call and sent them there in the first place often get left behind. Incident command is our scene until heroes can arrive to take over on scene; we provide instruction, coordination, clarity, for responding units to help maintain safety and ensure the scene gets an adequate response. Imagine a world where nobody was to answer 911.

Throughout my career I have spoken with victims of shootings, sexual assaults and violent crimes. I have stayed on the line with individuals performing CPR on loved ones. I have helped guide people in moments of extreme crisis including domestic violence, mental health emergencies, community unrest. I have counseled those of have lost loved ones, going through divorce or family issues. A 911 dispatcher wears many hats – crisis counselor, logistics coordinator, safety officers, and sometimes... a lifeline.

Public safety 911 telecommunicators are truly “the calm” in the storm. We are trained to remain calm in chaos, analyzing limited and rapidly evolving information to make critical and life-changing decisions under pressure. Under the incident command system framework currently taught nationwide, dispatchers are often seen as the first “incident commander” in any scene before a ranking official arrives on scene. Our role is foundational to every successful outcome. Without dispatch, there is no coordinated emergency response.

Moving towards First Responder re-classification is more than just a symbolic name change. It provides recognition, and helps us gain access to more training opportunities, wellness resources and retirement. It gains us a badge of honor that we already wear and helps us attract new dispatchers to the career. 911 has systemically nationwide had a shortage of staff for years, attracting new and qualified applicants needs to be a priority for our communities to function safely. Adding this benefit and recognition will help our dispatch centers do this.

I respectfully urge you to support HB 234 as well as HJR038. Recognizing public safety telecommunicators is a meaningful and necessary step in honoring the life-saving and important work that we do every day behind the headset. We are the backbone of every emergency response, the calm in the chaos, and the thin gold line. Please recognize us for doing so.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,



Kyle Hall, ENP

Police Dispatcher

Anchorage Police Department
4501 Elmore Rd, Anchorage, AK
99507

Office: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



MATCOM Public Safety
Dispatch Center
City of Wasilla



Mary Buchman
1800 E Parks Highway
Wasilla, AK 99654
[REDACTED]

March 4, 2026

House Labor and Commerce Committee:

I am writing this letter in support of House Joint Resolution No. 38, urging the Alaska State Legislature and our United States Congress to operationally re-classify 9-1-1 professionals, as public safety first responders in protective services by passing the Enhancing First Response Act.

My name is Mary Buchman, and I have over 15 years of experience in the profession of emergency telecommunications. I began my career on the front line as a 9-1-1 call taker and dispatcher, answering desperate calls, guiding CPR over the phone, coordinating responses to officer-involved emergencies, structure fires, suicides, domestic violence incidents, and mass-casualty events. Today, I serve as a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) Administrator, responsible for the operations, personnel, and technology that ensure our community receives immediate help when they dial 9-1-1.

During my career, I have witnessed the disconnect between what emergency communications professionals do and how they are officially classified. When someone calls 9-1-1, the voice that answers is the first first responder. These hardworking men and women assess chaotic, often life-threatening situations in seconds; they provide pre-arrival medical instructions; coordinate response efforts of field responders in law enforcement, fire, and EMS field; and manage critical incidents in real time.

Telecommunicators stay on the line while someone takes their last breath or while an officer calls out that shots have been fired.

Yet, these professionals are still classified in a category that suggests administrative support rather than frontline public safety work. This misclassification has real consequences. It affects recruitment and retention. It limits access to critical wellness resources and grant funding. It contributes to burnout and high turnover in a profession already under extraordinary strain. It diminishes recognition of the psychological trauma call takers and dispatchers endure daily. Most importantly, it undermines the sustainability of the 9-1-1 system itself.

Now, as a PSAP Administrator, I see the operational impact of this misalignment. We are facing staffing shortages nationwide. The training required to become proficient in emergency communications is extensive and highly specialized. Retaining experienced personnel is increasingly difficult when the profession is not formally recognized for what it truly is: a core component of public safety.

Reclassifying 9-1-1 professionals from administrative to public safety is not symbolic – it is foundational. It validates the work performed in our telecommunications centers. It aligns federal policy with operational reality. It strengthens grant eligibility, professional standards, and workforce development. It helps ensure that when a citizen dials 9-1-1, a trained and supported professional is there to answer.

This is not a partisan issue. Emergencies do not check political affiliation before they strike. Whether responding to a multi-vehicle accident, a cardiac arrest, a wildfire, or a school crisis, first responders are there – often at great personal cost. Supporting this bill sends a clear message that our Legislative bodies are aligned and values those who stand on the front lines of crisis.

After 15 years in this field, I remain deeply committed to this profession and to the people who serve within it. I have watched new personnel grow into confident 9-1-1 professionals. I have supported staff through critical incidents and cumulative trauma. I have also seen too many leave because the system does not adequately recognize or support the weight of this work.

Passing the Enhancing First Response Act – including proper occupational reclassification – is an essential step toward modernizing and stabilizing our nation's emergency response infrastructure.

I urge you to support this legislation and stand with the 9-1-1 professionals who serve as the vital first link in the chain of survival.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your commitment to public safety.

Respectfully,

Mary E. Buchman
Assistant Manager
MatCom Public Safety Dispatch

March 4, 2026

House Labor and Commerce Committee Members:

I am writing this letter in support of House Joint Resolution No. 38 urging the Alaska State Legislature and the United States Congress to recognize public safety telecommunicators as first responders by passing the Enhancing First Response Act.

My name is Frances Robinson. I have worked in public safety for nearly 20 years and currently serve as a public safety telecommunicator with the Anchorage Fire Department in Anchorage, AK. We provide Fire/EMS services to the Municipality of Anchorage, including Chugiak, Eagle River and 20 miles south of Girdwood.

I was the call taker and managed the radio channel for a structure fire in which one of our firefighters became trapped. In the middle of chaos and overwhelming emotion, I remained calm, coordinated resources and supported crews as I worked the channel alongside firefighters during the harrowing rescue. This is beyond the scope of a typical office and administrative support staff, as we're currently considered.

I was the calm voice reassuring a teenager that help was on the way, providing instructions to keep herself safe, while trapped in her home while that was on fire. Sadly, the fire ultimately claimed her father's life. This is beyond the scope of a typical office and administrative support staff.

I have coached countless callers through CPR of loved ones and complete strangers. I have guided callers in bringing new, precious babies into the world. I have also answered the call for an abandoned deceased baby left alone in a park to be found by a bystander. This is beyond the scope of a typical office and administrative support staff.

I was the call taker when the roof collapsed on our local CrossFit gym, claiming the life of one person. I coordinated resources for multiple agencies while firefighters worked tirelessly to rescue the life of another. All the while, not knowing if our responders would face a secondary collapse, risking their safety. This is beyond the scope of a typical office and administrative support staff.

The 9-1-1 telecommunicators and dispatchers in our community are critically important public safety personnel. We are the first point of contact and only have our voice to try and reassure callers help is on the way. We rarely get closure. Once we hang up, we are immediately ready for the next crisis, often not getting the opportunity to process what we heard.

I respectfully urge you to support House Joint Resolution No. 38. This is a meaningful first step in reclassifying and honoring dispatchers for the life-saving role we play in our communities but ultimately relies at the State Level to make tangible changes. We have the opportunity to continue this momentum with HB234.

Respectfully,

Frances Robinson

March 3, 2026

Lorrie Mott
Valdez Police Department
PO Box 307
Valdez, AK 99686


The Honorable Members of the Alaska State Legislature
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska

Re: Support for House Joint Resolution No. 38

Dear Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for House Joint Resolution No. 38 (HJR 038), recognizing Public Safety Telecommunicators as First Responders in the State of Alaska.

Public Safety Telecommunicators are the first, first responders. They are the calm voice in the darkness during someone's worst moment. Before law enforcement officers, firefighters, or emergency medical personnel arrive on scene, it is the telecommunicator who gathers critical information, prioritizes resources, provides life-saving instructions, and ensures responders are equipped with accurate and timely details.

In Alaska, where communities are separated by vast distances and challenging weather conditions, telecommunicators serve as the vital link between citizens and emergency services. Their responsibilities require rapid decision-making, emotional resilience, technical skill, and unwavering professionalism. They manage high-stress situations daily, often involving traumatic events, while maintaining composure and clarity under pressure.

Despite the essential and high-risk nature of their work, Public Safety Telecommunicators are not consistently recognized as First Responders. This lack of formal recognition does not reflect the reality of their role in the emergency response system. Passage of HJR 038 would appropriately acknowledge their integral contribution to public safety and provide them with the respect and status they have long deserved.

Recognizing Public Safety Telecommunicators as First Responders is not merely symbolic; it affirms their critical position within Alaska's emergency services framework and supports recruitment, retention, and morale within this demanding profession.

I respectfully urge you to support House Joint Resolution No. 38 and stand in recognition of the dedicated professionals who serve as the first point of contact in emergencies across our state. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Lorrie Mott

Dear House Labor and Commerce Committee,

I'm writing to ask that you support hard-working 9-1-1 professionals in our state by supporting House Joint Resolution No. 38, originating from the Alaska State Legislature. This urges the United States Congress to pass the Enhancing First Response Act, or similar legislation.

My name is Kristine Whitford and I am a Lead Dispatcher/EMT. I have worked for Anchorage Fire Department for 12 years.

This bipartisan legislation would direct the Office of Management and Budget to reclassify 9-1-1 call takers, dispatchers and telecommunicators to officially be recognized as Protective Service Occupations, similar to police officers and firefighters, instead of our current category, Office and Administrative Support Occupations.

Being classified as clerical workers limits our access to benefits afforded to other first responders and hinders recruitment and retention efforts. This act aims to acknowledge our life-saving work and improve our professional standing and support systems.

9-1-1 dispatchers are America's FIRST first responders, the crucial first point in emergencies, often handling high stress situations. On any given day, we may provide specialized emergency medical instruction, reassure people in crisis, and coordinate the arrival of police, fire, and EMS. We are highly trained in best practices and complex technologies. We work under uniquely stressful circumstances, especially during

wide-scale emergencies. I am the calm voice on the other end of the phone helping guide you to giving CPR to your loved one, acknowledging that you did the right thing by calling and it's scary seeing your child in a febrile seizure for the first time, successfully helping you deliver your baby at home and giving evacuating instructions when your home is on fire. I also dispatch Mobile Crisis Team for Mental Health crises and Anchorage Safety Patrol for public inebriates.

However, the U.S. Government classifies 9-1-1 as an "Office and Administrative Support Occupation," alongside office clerks and taxi dispatchers. This is an outdated, misinformed view of the work performed by 9-1-1 professionals, and it must be changed.

This small change would cost nothing and give 9-1-1 professionals the recognition they deserve. It also could lead to better research and action on workforce issues related to 9-1-1.

Please let me know you support our local 9-1-1 services by supporting House Joint Resolution No. 38. This is a much needed first step paving the way for changes at the State level with HB 234.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kristine Whitford
Lead Dispatcher/EMT
Anchorage Fire Department
