



Representative Carolyn Hall

House District 16 | Turnagain, Spenard, and Sand Lake

HB 234 Version N Sponsor Statement

"An Act relating to emergency medical dispatchers; classifying dispatchers in police or fire departments and in state trooper offices as peace officers under the public employees' retirement system; and providing for an effective date."

Public safety telecommunicators, also known as emergency response dispatchers, are often called the *first* first responders, and are a critical part of our first responder system. Emergency response dispatchers are the first contact a distressed person has when calling 9-1-1. They deliver life-saving instructions before other first responders arrive, quickly calm people experiencing the worst day of their lives, obtain an accurate address and critical details, give instructions, and coordinate emergency responders within a few minutes of receiving that call. Patient outcome and emergency responder safety are directly affected by the dispatchers' ability to perform this critical work.

Yet, the federal Standard Occupational Classification system classifies dispatchers under "Office and Administrative Support Occupations" instead of "Protective Service Occupations", which is how their fellow first responder colleagues are classified. Reclassifying emergency response dispatchers in state statute is the first step towards providing them with access to new training opportunities, grant opportunities for Alaska Dispatch Centers, access to wellness resources, and opportunities to receive enhanced retirement benefits, alongside their first responder colleagues.

HB 234 recognizes the importance of the critical work emergency response dispatchers provide to our state by including them in the same statutory definition as their first responder colleagues. By including them in this definition, eligible emergency response dispatchers would be able to accrue service credit in the Public Employees Retirement System Defined Benefit Plan and Defined Contribution Plan with access to the same early retirement benefits as their colleagues.

HB 324 recognizes the incredible lifesaving work emergency response dispatchers provide Alaskans, and the critical role they play as part of the first responder system.