

To whom it may concern,

Dispatchers are the first point of contact in any emergency, serving as the lifeline between those in crisis and the emergency personnel who respond. They provide life-saving instructions, gather crucial situational information, and ensure that first responders arrive equipped with the necessary information to address the situation. Their decisions and actions directly impact the outcome of emergencies and often mean the difference between life and death. While dispatchers may not be physically present at an emergency scene, their role is no less critical. They manage chaotic situations, provide immediate guidance to individuals in life-threatening scenarios, and coordinate multi-agency responses during large-scale emergencies. The mental and emotional toll they endure mirrors that of traditional first responders, as they are exposed to traumatic events through the voices of those in need.

The recognition of dispatchers as first responders would ensure they receive the appropriate resources, training, and mental health support necessary to perform their duties effectively. It would also validate their role as a fundamental component of the emergency response network. Furthermore, in federally declared emergencies, dispatchers often serve as key communication hubs within Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs). Their expertise in crisis management is indispensable for maintaining situational awareness, allocating resources, and ensuring effective coordination among local, state, and federal agencies. The Stafford Act, which governs federal disaster response, highlights the importance of comprehensive communication and coordination—responsibilities that dispatchers fulfill with unwavering dedication.

Recognizing dispatchers as first responders is not just a symbolic gesture; it is a practical and necessary acknowledgment of their role in safeguarding our communities. By making this designation, we ensure that dispatchers receive the support and respect they have long earned.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

John Huffman, MSDM

Director, University of Alaska Anchorage Emergency Management

Signed by:

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Letter for support in changing 911 operators to first responders

From Amie Nieves [REDACTED]
Date Sat 3/21/2026 2:33 PM
To Maya Narang <Maya.Narang@akleg.gov>

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to advocate for the formal classification of 911 dispatchers and emergency communications personnel as first responders.

For context, I have dispatched for over 20 years in both public and private dispatch centers. Currently, I work in the North Slope Oil Field in the private industry. Where this change would not affect my current dispatching job, I know how crucial this change is.

For those of us who have worked in emergency communications—especially in remote and high-risk environments such as Alaska’s North Slope—the reality is clear: dispatchers are not secondary to emergency response; they are the first point of contact in every critical incident. Every emergency begins with a voice on the other end of the line, and that voice carries the responsibility of gathering life-saving information, coordinating resources, and guiding callers through situations that are often chaotic, dangerous, and time-sensitive.

In Alaska, this role carries additional weight. The remoteness of many communities, extreme weather conditions, and limited access to immediate on-site resources mean that dispatchers must operate at a higher level of decision-making and situational awareness. Training opportunities are often limited due to geography and logistics, making it even more critical that dispatchers are recognized appropriately and provided with the resources, development, and professional standards that align with other first responders.

The psychological and emotional demands of dispatching are significant. Dispatchers are routinely exposed to high-stress, high-stakes situations, including medical emergencies, accidents, and life-threatening incidents. They are required to remain calm, precise, and effective while managing multiple channels of communication and often supporting callers through the worst moments of their lives. Despite this, their role is frequently undervalued in comparison to other emergency services.

Reclassifying dispatchers as first responders would not only acknowledge the reality of the work—it would directly benefit public safety. This recognition would help attract higher-quality candidates who are committed to a career in emergency services, rather than viewing dispatch as a stepping stone. It would support improved training standards, increased retention, and greater professional accountability. In turn, this leads to better outcomes for the public: faster, more accurate responses, improved coordination, and a more resilient emergency response system overall.

Retention is a critical issue in dispatch centers across the country, and especially in remote regions. High turnover leads to gaps in experience, increased training burdens, and greater risk during emergency operations. Providing dispatchers with the same recognition and professional standing as other first

responders would strengthen commitment, improve morale, and reduce turnover—ultimately creating a more stable and capable workforce.

At its core, this is not simply about recognition—it is about aligning policy with reality. Dispatchers are an integral part of the emergency response system. They are the first voice in a crisis, the coordinator of resources, and the steady presence that bridges the gap between the public and field responders.

Recognizing them as first responders is a necessary step toward strengthening emergency services as a whole and ensuring the highest level of care and coordination for the communities we serve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Amie Nieves

Sent from [Outlook](#)

House Community and Regional Affairs 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 Bill 234 in hopes of reclassifying emergency dispatchers 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

Hello,

I am writing in support of HB 234 to reclassify emergency dispatchers as First Responders.

I will be reaching my 3-year anniversary as a Public Safety Dispatcher for the Sitka Police Department on July 25, and I absolutely love my position and how I can help people every day.

In my day-to-day, helping people as a dispatcher means taking a variety of calls from the public who are reporting a variety of incidents from reckless drivers and sending the closest officer before a serious accident can occur to sending an ambulance to someone who has a heart attack.

Within my first year, our dispatch center received an SOS alert from a boat north of our town that had flipped over. I received coordinates from Apple and our Rapidsos system and relayed them to my sergeant who was on the phone with the Coast Guard (as I was the only dispatcher on at the time despite being a 2-person center). The Coast Guard was able to respond to the location with continuous coordinate updates from our center as the boat was moving at a high rate of speed from the wind and waves.

In the end, two of the boaters had died, but three had survived because of the response we could provide by having a dispatcher in our center who knew how our systems worked and recognized that the injured parties were constantly moving. Southeast Alaska is known for these types of calls.

These are the types of calls that dispatchers in Alaska deal with constantly. It is not the only call of this nature I have taken, and not the last I likely will, unfortunately. But without the equipment and training provided, these search and rescues (or SARs) would not be possible.

In addition, I have taken calls from people who have found loved ones dead from self-inflicted gun shot wounds, people whose loved ones were having seizures, boaters with passengers having medical emergencies, I have watched someone on our camera jump off a bridge as our officers tried to talk them down while I dispatched a trooper boat, just to name a few calls. Each call required a different response to get responders to the victims of these incidents while staying calm and on the phone. I have also started CPR on patients and provided instructions to those whose family members are having medical traumas such as lacerations or seizures.

My day-to-day (or night-to-night) also involves just generally aiding our law enforcement officers and EMT/firefighters who are out in the field. From checking warrant statuses, to monitoring our jail, to doing safety checks on our field personnel, I (and our other dispatchers) must be vigilant about what is happening to our responders and in the city. If I do not do a status check on an officer responding to a domestic and he or she gets hurt because I do not check, that responsibility is on me. I have had calls where officers required call outs and I was the only one who could provide that call out.

With this importance comes the emotional and physical toll. Our department runs 12-hour shifts. Our department (like every other) requires 24-hour monitoring. For over a year of time, our department had two full-time dispatchers (myself and one other). This was not the most efficient way to work. This put hours of overtime on me and the other dispatcher which took us away from our family's day and night and put a physical toll on our bodies from regular night shift and last second call outs.

Since I became a dispatcher, I have been asked what my plan is for the future and if this is a "steppingstone" to becoming a cop or firefighter. I am surprised to hear this because those people also tell me that they could never do something this complex. I work with 9 computer monitors, a foot pedal, and multiple radios. This takes time to learn. Seasoned, career dispatchers do not grow overnight. Improving retirement benefits incentivizes people to pursue this career and can show young kids that this can be a dream job. We often have kids come through and say that they dream of being a cop or a firefighter. I have yet to hear "I want to be a 911 dispatcher." I believe that this bill would be a steppingstone to changing the culture of dispatching to being known as a full-time career move.

It may sound like I am complaining. But I love my job. I love the people I work with and being able to provide calm to chaos. We need support though. This bill would support filling those staffing gaps (municipalities can only do so much), recognize the important work that all of us do, acknowledge the physical toll that we deal with from years of graves, call outs, and stress, and acknowledge that being a dispatcher is a full-time career that requires the training and experience of a full-time career.

Jared Boekenhauer

Public Safety Dispatcher

Sitka Police Department

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



Anchorage Fire Department

Frances Robinson | Dispatcher – 911 Telecommunicator
[REDACTED]

March 9, 2026

House Community & Regional Affairs Committee Members:

I am writing this letter in support of House Bill 234 reclassifying emergency dispatchers in police or fire departments and state trooper offices as public safety first responders.

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. Telecommunicators routinely make split second life-saving decisions in a dynamic environment. These traumatic events can lead to PTSD and emotional strain and depression from the high stress calls.

I respectfully urge you to support House Bill 234. This is a meaningful first step in reclassifying and honoring dispatchers for the life-saving role we play in our communities.

Respectfully,

Frances Robinson



Frances Robinson

911 Telecommunicator

Anchorage Fire Department

100 E. 4th Ave

Anchorage, Alaska 99501

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

PulsePoint  

SUZANNE HALL

• Sterling, AK 99672

March 9, 2026

Dear Representative Hall,

I am writing to express my strong support for HB 234, “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.”

I have served as a 911 dispatcher for 24 years and currently work as a shift and training supervisor. For nearly a quarter of a century, I have answered the worst moments of people's lives—heart attacks, suicides, fires, domestic violence, serious accidents, and calls where children are in danger. In those moments, the voice they hear is mine. While we may not be physically present at the scene, we are the first point of contact for people in crisis – the specialized instructions we provide have tremendous impact on scene safety and outcomes.

With every call, public safety dispatchers carry a tremendous emotional burden. We help people through their most traumatic moments and guide them through lifesaving instructions while hearing the chaos, panic, and grief unfolding in real time. We stay on the line while someone takes their last breaths or while a family member desperately tries to save a loved one. Those sounds and experiences do not simply disappear when the call disconnects - we all have stories that would keep you up at night.

We not only provide vital services to our callers, public safety dispatchers are also a lifeline to the first responders in the field. Police officers, firefighters, and EMS crews rely on us for critical information, coordination, and constant support while they face dangerous and unpredictable situations. We track their locations, relay urgent updates, coordinate backup, and ensure resources are moving when seconds matter most. When an officer calls for help, when firefighters face rapidly changing conditions, or when medics are racing to save a life, dispatchers are the ones coordinating the response and making sure help reaches them. In those moments, we are not just supporting the public—we are protecting the responders as well.

Over time, this constant exposure to trauma leads to compassion fatigue and cumulative stress. Dispatchers experience many of the same mental health challenges faced by other first responders including anxiety, burnout, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress including PTSD yet we are classified as clerical employees and as are subject to the same work requirements in PERS. This is unacceptable.

Public safety dispatchers are not simply call takers—we are highly trained professionals who make critical decisions in seconds. We triage emergencies, coordinate police, fire, and medical responses, and provide lifesaving instructions before responders ever arrive.

HB 234 acknowledges the reality of the work we do and the toll it takes. Classifying dispatchers within police and fire departments and state trooper offices as peace officers under PERS would recognize the essential role we play in public safety and the sacrifices made by those who dedicate their careers to this profession.

After 24 years of service, I have seen firsthand how important this recognition would be—not only for myself, but for the many dedicated dispatchers who work long hours under immense pressure to keep our communities safe.

I respectfully and enthusiastically support HB 234 and thank you for your continued advocacy on behalf of Alaska's public safety dispatchers.

Thank you for your time and for your service to our state.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Hall
911 Shift/Training Supervisor
Soldotna Public Safety Dispatch Center
Soldotna, Alaska