

SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 234

IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA

THIRTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE - SECOND SESSION

BY REPRESENTATIVE HALL

Introduced: 2/23/26

Referred: Community and Regional Affairs, Labor and Commerce

A BILL

FOR AN ACT ENTITLED

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

4 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

5 * **Section 1.** AS 18.08.200(7) is amended to read:

6 (7) "emergency medical dispatcher" means **an initial first responder**
7 [A] trained **as a** public safety telecommunicator with additional training and specific
8 emergency medical knowledge essential for the efficient management of emergency
9 medical communications;

10 * **Sec. 2.** AS 39.35.680(30) is amended to read:

11 (30) "peace officer" or "firefighter" means an employee occupying a
12 position as a peace officer, chief of police, regional public safety officer, correctional
13 officer, correctional superintendent, firefighter, fire chief, **dispatcher in a police or**
14 **fire department or in a state trooper office,** or probation officer, but does not

1 include a village public safety officer **or dispatcher** employed by a village public
2 safety officer program established under AS 18.65.670;

3 * **Sec. 3.** AS 39.35.990(20) is amended to read:

4 (20) "peace officer" or "firefighter" means an employee occupying a
5 position as a peace officer, chief of police, regional public safety officer, correctional
6 officer, correctional superintendent, firefighter, fire chief, **dispatcher in a police or**
7 **fire department or in a state trooper office,** or probation officer, but does not
8 include a village public safety officer **or dispatcher** employed by a village public
9 safety officer program established under AS 18.65.670;

10 * **Sec. 4.** This Act takes effect July 1, 2026.



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.



Representative Carolyn Hall

House District 16 | Turnagain, Spenard, and Sand Lake

HB 234 Version N Sectional Analysis – April 9, 2026

Section 1:

Amends AS 18.08.200(7) to define an “emergency medical dispatcher” as an initial first responder trained as a public safety telecommunicator.

Section 2:

Amends AS 39.35.680(30) to add emergency response dispatchers in a police or fire department or in a state trooper office to be included in the definitions of “peace officers” or “firefighter” in reference to Article 9. Provisions Generally Applicable to Employees Hired Before July 1, 2006

Section 3:

Amends AS 39.35.990(20) to add emergency medical dispatchers in a police or fire department or in a state trooper office to be included in the definitions of “peace officers” or “firefighter” in reference to Article 10. Employees First Hired on or after July 1, 2006,

Section 4:

Sets the effective date to July 1, 2026

Fiscal Note

State of Alaska
2026 Legislative Session

Bill Version: HB 234
Fiscal Note Number: _____
() Publish Date: _____

Identifier: HB234-DPS-AST-3-6-26
Title: PERS: EMERGENCY DISPATCHERS
Sponsor: HALL
Requester: (H) Community & Regional Affairs

Department: Department of Public Safety
Appropriation: Alaska State Troopers
Allocation: Dispatch Services
OMB Component Number: 3346

Expenditures/Revenues

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below. (Thousands of Dollars)

	FY2027	Included in	Out-Year Cost Estimates				
	Appropriation Requested	Governor's FY2027 Request	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031	FY 2032
OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2027	FY 2027					
Personal Services							
Travel							
Services							
Commodities							
Capital Outlay							
Grants & Benefits							
Miscellaneous							
Total Operating	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Fund Source (Operating Only)

None							
Total	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Positions

Full-time							
Part-time							
Temporary							

Change in Revenues

None							
Total	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Estimated SUPPLEMENTAL (FY2026) cost: 0.0 *(separate supplemental appropriation required)*

Estimated CAPITAL (FY2027) cost: 0.0 *(separate capital appropriation required)*

Does the bill create or modify a new fund or account? No
(Supplemental/Capital/New Fund - discuss reasons and fund source(s) in analysis section)

ASSOCIATED REGULATIONS

Does the bill direct, or will the bill result in, regulation changes adopted by your agency? No
If yes, by what date are the regulations to be adopted, amended or repealed? N/A

Why this fiscal note differs from previous version/comments:

Initial fiscal note; not applicable.

Prepared By: <u>Scott Bartlett, Captain</u>	Phone: <u>(907)269-5611</u>
Division: <u>Commissioner's Office</u>	Date: <u>03/06/2026</u>
Approved By: <u>Dianna Thornton, Director</u>	Date: <u>03/06/26</u>
Agency: <u>Administrative Services</u>	

FISCAL NOTE ANALYSIS

STATE OF ALASKA
2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. HB 234

Analysis

This bill amends statute to classify dispatchers in police and fire departments and in state trooper offices as peace officers for purposes of the Public Employees' Retirement System. The change affects retirement eligibility by allowing qualifying dispatchers to retire under the peace officer and firefighter provisions of PERS.

Dispatch personnel employed by the Department of Public Safety will remain in their current positions with no changes to job duties, staffing levels, compensation structures, or training requirements as a result of this legislation. A review of employer benefit costs within the State's budget system indicates that the proposed classification does not change the employer retirement contribution rate paid by the department.

While earlier retirement eligibility may present operational considerations over time, the legislation does not create a direct or quantifiable budget impact to the Department of Public Safety.

The department does not anticipate an increase in workload, staffing, or operating costs as a result of this legislation. Implementation can be absorbed within existing resources. There is no fiscal impact anticipated to the Department of Public Safety.

Fiscal Note

State of Alaska
2026 Legislative Session

Bill Version: HB 234
 Fiscal Note Number: _____
 () Publish Date: _____

Identifier: HB234-DOA-DRB-03-06-2026
 Title: PERS: EMERGENCY DISPATCHERS
 Sponsor: HALL
 Requester: (H) Community & Regional Affairs

Department: Department of Administration
 Appropriation: Centralized Administrative Services
 Allocation: Retirement and Benefits
 OMB Component Number: 64

Expenditures/Revenues

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below. (Thousands of Dollars)

	FY2027	Included in	Out-Year Cost Estimates					
	Appropriation Requested	Governor's FY2027 Request	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031	FY 2032
OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2027	FY 2027	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031	FY 2032
Personal Services								
Travel								
Services								
Commodities								
Capital Outlay								
Grants & Benefits								
Miscellaneous								
Total Operating	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Fund Source (Operating Only)

None								
Total	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Positions

Full-time								
Part-time								
Temporary								

Change in Revenues

None								
Total	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Estimated SUPPLEMENTAL (FY2026) cost: 0.0 *(separate supplemental appropriation required)*

Estimated CAPITAL (FY2027) cost: 0.0 *(separate capital appropriation required)*

Does the bill create or modify a new fund or account? No
(Supplemental/Capital/New Fund - discuss reasons and fund source(s) in analysis section)

ASSOCIATED REGULATIONS

Does the bill direct, or will the bill result in, regulation changes adopted by your agency? No
 If yes, by what date are the regulations to be adopted, amended or repealed? N/A

Why this fiscal note differs from previous version/comments:

Not applicable, initial version.

Prepared By: <u>Brandon Roomsburg</u>	Phone: <u>(907)465-5717</u>
Division: <u>Retirement & Benefits</u>	Date: <u>03/06/2026</u>
Approved By: <u>Stefanie Bingham, Administrative Services Director</u>	Date: <u>03/06/26</u>
Agency: <u>Department of Administration</u>	

FISCAL NOTE ANALYSIS

STATE OF ALASKA
2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BILL NO. HB234

Analysis

This bill impacts the Public Employees Retirement System Defined Benefit Plan and Defined Contribution Plan by amending the definition of a peace officer/firefighter to include dispatchers in a police or fire department or in a state trooper office. This will allow eligible dispatchers to accrue service credit as a peace officer or firefighter and subsequently meet retirement eligibility under this category. Under the Defined Benefits Plan, eligible dispatchers would have their contribution rate to the Public Employees' Retirement System adjusted from 6.75 percent to 7.5 percent and would qualify for retirement at any age once they accrue 20 years of peace officer/firefighter service or a combined 30 years of service or at age 60 with vested status, whichever occurs first. In the Defined Contribution Plan their contribution rate would remain 8 percent with eligibility for access to retiree medical coverage at any age with 25 years of peace officer/firefighter service or a combined 30 years of service or at Medicare age eligibility with 10 years of service.

Eligible dispatchers in the Defined Benefit Plan who retire as a peace officer/firefighter who are a tier III member will have their pension benefit calculated based on their high three (3) consecutive years salary instead of their high five (5) consecutive years salary.

The Division of Retirement and Benefits will not accrue any additional cost for personal services if this bill were to pass. The Division of Retirement and Benefits is already positioned and staffed to retire dispatchers who will qualify for peace officer/firefighter service credit if this bill were to become law.



State of Alaska

DEFINED CONTRIBUTION PLANS

Alaska Public Employees' Defined Contribution Retirement Plan (PERS DCR) Overview

Alaska's Defined Contribution Retirement (DCR) Plan at a glance. The plan provides participants with both an investment plan and defined benefits such as occupational death, occupational disability, retiree medical coverage and a Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA). More detailed information is available on the Alaska Division of Retirement and Benefits website at drb.alaska.gov/employee/dcrplan.html.



FEATURE	PERS DCR PLAN
Your Contribution	8% of salary (pre-tax payroll deductions)
Employer Contribution	5% of salary
Vesting in Investment Account	100% vested in your contributions immediately. Vested in employer contributions based on the following schedule: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 25% after 2 years of service• 50% after 3 years• 75% after 4 years• 100% after 5 years
Occupational Disability Benefits	40% of salary; you earn service while on occupational disability. Employer continues to make all required contributions to your DCR account/medical/HRA, including your 8% employee contribution. No medical insurance until eligible for normal retirement. Disability benefits cease when you become eligible for normal retirement; at that point, you can access your investment account/medical/HRA.

FEATURE	PERS DCR PLAN
<p>Occupational Death Benefits</p>	<p>Survivor receives 40% of member’s salary or 50% for peace officers and fire fighters (P/F); you earn service while occupational death benefits are paid to your surviving spouse or eligible dependent children. Employer continues to make all required contributions to an account set up for your survivors, including your 8% employee contribution.</p> <p>Death benefits cease when you would have become eligible for normal retirement; at that point, your survivors can access your investment account/medical/HRA.</p>
<p>Retiree Medical Coverage</p>	<p>Must retire directly from the system at Medicare-eligible age with 10 years of service, or any age with 30 years of service or 25 years of P/F service. If you are not eligible for Medicare, you will have to pay the full premium until you reach Medicare eligibility. You may use the health reimbursement arrangement (HRA) account to pay premiums. Once the account is exhausted, you will self-pay the premiums.</p> <p>When you are eligible for Medicare, Medicare will be your primary insurance with the retiree medical plan being supplemental. The percentage of the premium you or your surviving spouse will pay is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10-14 years of service: 30% • 15-19 years: 25% • 20-24 years: 20% • 25-29 years: 15% • 30 years or more: 10%
<p>Health Reimbursement Arrangement</p>	<p>100% funded by your employer each payday. The employer will deposit a flat dollar amount based on 3% of the annual average salary across all PERS and TRS employees. The HRA is accessible at Medicare age with 10 years of service, OR at any age with a service-based retirement. No requirement to retire directly from the system. Once eligible, you can use this account to pay any qualified out-of-pocket medical expenses.</p>

DISCLAIMER: The information contained in this flyer contains a summary description of benefits for the Public Employees’ Retirement System and the AlaskaCare Defined Contribution Retiree Benefit Plan. The Division of Retirement and Benefits has made every effort to ensure, but does not guarantee, that the information provided is accurate and up-to-date. Where information in this flyer conflicts with the relevant Plan Document, the Plan Document controls.



ALASKA DIVISION OF RETIREMENT AND BENEFITS

Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS) Plan Comparison Chart

Feature	PERS DB Plan Tier I 1/1/1961 – 6/30/1986	PERS DB Plan Tier II Entered after 6/30/1986	PERS DB Plan Tier III Entered after 6/30/1996	PERS DCR Plan Entered after 6/30/2006
Employee Contribution (% of pay)	Pre-tax employee contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.75% beginning 1/1/87: all others • 7.5% beginning 1/1/87: police/fire • 9.6% beginning 7/1/99: school district Alt Option 	Pre-tax employee contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.75% beginning 1/1/87: all others • 7.5% beginning 1/1/87: police/fire • 9.6% beginning 7/1/99: school district Alt Option 	Pre-tax employee contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.75% beginning 1/1/87: all others • 7.5% beginning 1/1/87: police/fire • 9.6% beginning 7/1/99: school district Alt Option 	Pre-tax employee contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8%
Employer Contribution (% of payroll)	22% Cost Share	22% Cost Share	22% Cost Share	5% DCR Plan Account Health Reimbursement Arrangement (HRA) Contribution: Flat dollar amount per employee based on 3% of the average annual compensation of all employees of all employers in the system. Retiree Medical Plan Contribution: Actuarially determined each fiscal year. Occupational Death & Disability Plan Contribution : Actuarially determined each fiscal year. For details on rates by fiscal year, please visit: drb.alaska.gov/employer/contributions.html
Vesting	Employees vest with 5 years of service.	Employees vest with 5 years of service.	Employees vest in the pension plan with 5 years of service and in the retiree medical plan with 10 years of service.	100% vested in employee contributions immediately. Vested in employer contributions based on the following schedule: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% after 2 years of service • 50% after 3 years • 75% after 4 years • 100% after 5 years
Qualifications for Retirement	After vesting, normal retirement age is 55, with early retirement at age 50. Police/fire members can retire at any age after 20 years of police/fire service. All other members can retire at any age after 30 years of membership service. Early retirement reduction will be 1/2% per month or 6% per year for every year less than the required normal retirement age.	After vesting, normal retirement age is 60, with early retirement at age 55. Police/fire members can retire at any age after 20 years of police/fire service. All other members can retire at any age after 30 years of membership service. Early retirement reduction will be 1/2% per month or 6% per year for every year less than the required normal retirement age.	After vesting, normal retirement age is 60, with early retirement at age 55. Police/fire members can retire at any age after 20 years of police/fire service. All other members can retire at any age after 30 years of membership service. Early retirement reduction will be 1/2% per month or 6% per year for every year less than the required normal retirement age.	None for investment account. Taxes and penalties may apply if withdrawn before age 59-1/2. Police/Fire members are exempt from early withdrawal penalties if they retire/separate at age of 50 or have at least 25 years of Police/Fire service. See requirements for Retirement Medical Coverage.
Benefit Calculation Formula	Benefit formula: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2% for first 10 years and all years of service prior to July 1, 1986, • 2.25% for the next 10 years, and • 2.5% per year thereafter. Benefit calculation is determined on the average of the high three consecutive years' salary. • Police/Fire: 2% X 10; 2.5% over 10. 	Benefit formula: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2% for first 10 years, • 2.25% for the next 10 years, and • 2.5% per year thereafter. Benefit calculation is determined on the average of the high three consecutive years' salary. • Police/Fire: 2% X 10; 2.5% over 10. 	Benefit formulas did not change. However, the benefit calculation is determined on the average of the high five consecutive years' salary. The benefit calculation for police and fire members is the average of the high three consecutive years regardless of tier (effective 2002).	DCR Plan account balance plus investment earnings. May be received in several different payment options. Payout options include lump sum payments, rollovers to another qualified plan, or annuities. Annuities may be taken as a lifetime annuity, joint and survivor annuity, or for a period certain.

Find more detailed information on the Division website at drb.alaska.gov, or in the *PERS Information Handbook*.

Feature	PERS DB Plan Tier I 1/1/1961 – 6/30/1986	PERS DB Plan Tier II Entered after 6/30/1986	PERS DB Plan Tier III Entered after 6/30/1996	PERS DCR Plan Entered after 6/30/2006
Alaska Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA)	An Alaska Cost-of-Living Allowance is payable to benefit recipients who remain domiciled in Alaska after retirement. The allowance is \$50 or 10% of the base benefit, whichever is greater.	An Alaska Cost-of-Living Allowance is payable to benefit recipients age 65 or older, or disability benefit recipients regardless of age, who remain domiciled in Alaska after retirement. The allowance is \$50 or 10% of the base benefit, whichever is greater.	An Alaska Cost-of-Living Allowance is payable to benefit recipients age 65 or older, or disability benefit recipients regardless of age, who remain domiciled in Alaska after retirement. The allowance is \$50 or 10% of the base benefit, whichever is greater.	None provided.
Post Retirement Pension Adjustments (PRPA) (Inflation Protection)	PRPA increases are granted on an ad hoc basis. If an ad hoc is not granted, Tier I employees must be age 60 or over or receiving benefits for 5 years to qualify for the automatic PRPA. The automatic PRPA passed in 1986 applies to all members regardless of hire date.	Automatic PRPA adjustments to disabled members, retirees age 60 and over, and those who have received benefits for 5 years.	Automatic PRPA adjustments to disabled members, retirees age 60 and over, and those who have received benefits for 5 years.	None provided.
Retirement Medical Coverage	After vesting, medical coverage is provided to all benefit recipients and their eligible dependents. The retirement system pays the AlaskaCare retiree medical plan premium.	After vesting, medical coverage is provided to disabilitants, regardless of age, and benefit recipients age 60 and over, or: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police/fire members with 25 years of police/fire service • All other members with 30 years of membership service This coverage includes eligible dependents. The retirement system pays the AlaskaCare retiree medical plan premium. Retirees and survivors under age 60 must pay the full premium cost if they desire coverage.	Same as Tier II. However, employees must accrue a minimum of 10 years of credited service* to have system-paid coverage at age 60. Employees with less than 10 years service must pay the full premiums as long as they wish to continue medical coverage. 100% vested with 10 years of credited service. *Credited service includes all service used in the calculation of a retirement benefit.	Access to medical coverage at Medicare-eligible age with 10 years of service or at any age with 25 years of service for peace officers and firefighters or with 30 years of service for all others. Must retire directly from the system. If not eligible for Medicare, the member must pay the full premium. May use health reimbursement arrangement (HRA) account to pay premiums at Medicare age with 10 years of service or at any age with 25 years of service for peace officers and firefighters or with 30 years of service for all others. When eligible for Medicare, the percentage of premium paid by the retiree or surviving spouse is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10-14 years of service: 30% • 15-19 years: 25% • 20-24 years: 20% • 25-29 years: 15% • 30 years or more: 10%
Disability Benefits	Nonoccupational disability benefits are calculated as a normal retirement. Occupational disability provides 40% of the gross monthly compensation. Different occupational disability formula available before 7/1/76.	Nonoccupational disability benefits are calculated as a normal retirement. Occupational disability provides 40% of the gross monthly compensation.	Nonoccupational disability benefits are calculated as a normal retirement. Occupational disability provides 40% of the gross monthly compensation.	Must be a total and presumably permanent disability whose cause is directly related to performance of duties of the job or an on the job injury. Benefit is 40% of salary; earns service while on occupational disability. No medical insurance until eligible for a normal retirement. Employer continues to make all required contributions as if the member were working, plus the member's required contributions to the DCR account, without deduction from the member's disability payment. Disability benefits cease when the member becomes eligible for normal retirement at Medicare-eligible age and 10 years of service or at any age with 25 years of service for peace officers and firefighters or with 30 years of service for all others.



MATCOM PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS CENTER 911 SYSTEM OVERVIEW



Coverage	65,598 sq mi (≈ West Virginia)
Population	115,000+
911 Calls	36,000+/yr
Other Calls	200,000+/yr

WHAT WE DO

Answer 911 and non-emergency calls, dispatch police, fire, and EMS, and coordinate response across a large and diverse region using multiple communication systems.

LIFESAVING INSTRUCTIONS

Dispatchers provide step-by-step instructions over the phone for medical emergencies (CPR, choking, bleeding), fire situations (evacuation and safety), and police incidents (safety guidance until responders arrive).

WHY IT MATTERS

In many areas we serve, 911 is the only access to emergency care. Dispatchers ensure help is sent, coordinate responders, and guide callers through critical moments.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE: MatCom connects communities to emergency response across one of Alaska's largest service areas.

Anchorage Fire Department

Frances Robinson | Dispatcher – 911 Telecommunicator

frances.robinson@anchorageak.gov

April 2, 2026

House Community & Regional Affairs Committee Members:

I would like to offer some insight into the role of a dispatcher. I became a dispatcher in Anchorage in 2007. Since then, the role has evolved and taken on more responsibility. I was hired as a fire/EMS dispatcher. All 911 calls go to APD and then if it's a fire or medical call it's transferred to AFD. We handle a multitude of business and non-emergent phone calls ranging from alarm technicians working on an alarm system, schools conducting a fire drill, calls for burn permits, inquiries if it's a burn day and other inquiries from the public that may come in on 311. We dispatch for the rural communities of Girdwood extending to mile 75 of the Seward Highway, and for Chugiak all the way to the most southern Knik River bridge. We coordinate back country rescues off the trail system, responses for Whittier when requested and at times beyond mile 75 according to the EPHESA agreement. I have worked through the ever-changing environment of Ebola, COVID, volcanic eruptions, and the spice drug epidemic. We're trained to not only listen to what the caller's telling us but also to listen to what's happening in the background. We are scheduled for 12-hour shifts in which we sit in front of 8 computer screens and simultaneously answer 911's and operate a radio channel. What this means is that we could be providing CPR instructions on the phone while communicating with firefighters on a radio channel who could be fighting fire. As a dispatcher, you're handling both simultaneously while neither the caller nor the firefighters are aware you're handling two different emergencies at the same time. That's multi-tasking to the extreme.

In 2012 our agency answered 38,125 calls for emergencies and 6,330 calls for private ambulance transports. In 2025 our agency answered 83,090 calls for emergencies and 5,820 calls for private ambulance transports. In 2013 we took on the additional task of answering calls and dispatching for the Anchorage Safety Patrol. This last year alone accounted for 17,941 ASP calls. In 2021 we began answering calls and dispatching for the Mobile Crisis Team, adding an additional 5,446 calls in 2025. These statistics don't include business calls. Our workload has continued to increase with the same staffing levels until recently.

There's trauma that can incur in the moment as well as accumulative trauma. As 911 continues to evolve there's progression towards text and video 911 calls. Currently 19 years into my dispatch career, I am concerned about serving in this role another 11 years with added visual trauma.

I'm happy to expand on this further or answer any additional questions.

Respectfully,

Frances Robinson



Frances Robinson

911 Telecommunicator

Anchorage Fire Department

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PulsePoint  



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Teri Forst, Owner / Counselor
Anchor Counseling & Consulting, LLC

April 8, 2026

RE: Support for Reclassification of Emergency Dispatchers as Public Safety Professionals

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified First Responder Counselor, and National Emergency Responder and Public Safety Certified Clinician. I specialize in providing mental health and substance use services for first responder populations and am writing to express strong support for legislation that would reclassify emergency dispatchers (telecommunicators) as public safety professionals rather than clerical or administrative staff. This reclassification is not only appropriate—it is essential to accurately reflect the psychological demands, occupational risks, and public safety role these professionals carry every day.

Emergency dispatchers are the first point of contact in crises involving violence, suicide, medical emergencies, and life-threatening events. While they may not be physically present on scene, they are psychologically immersed in trauma exposure, often serving as the lifeline between chaos and coordinated response. Research consistently demonstrates that this repeated exposure has measurable and significant mental health impacts comparable to those experienced by police, fire, and EMS personnel.

A recent systematic review and meta-analysis examining thousands of dispatchers across multiple countries found that:

- Approximately 17.8% of dispatchers experience symptoms consistent with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
- 28.2% experience depression, and
- 17.2% experience anxiety disorders

These rates are comparable to those found in traditionally recognized first responder groups and are far higher than the general population and other clerical or administrative staff populations. In fact, emergency dispatchers are explicitly identified in the literature as part of the broader “first responder” population who are at elevated risk for mental health disorders related to their work trauma exposure.

Dispatchers experience unique forms of trauma exposure, including:

- Listening in real time to life-threatening events (e.g., suicides, assaults, cardiac arrests)
- Providing life-saving instructions while outcomes remain uncertain
- Repeated exposure to emotionally charged calls without physical resolution or closure

This type of exposure is often described as vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress, which can be equally harmful as direct exposure.

Beyond mental health diagnoses, the occupational strain associated with dispatch work has clear physiological and functional consequences. Studies show that dispatchers experience chronic stress responses, including elevated heart rates and reduced heart rate variability—both indicators of long-term health risk. Additionally, research identifies increased rates of:

- Sleep disturbances and insomnia
- Headaches, fatigue, and other stress-related physical conditions
- Cancer, diabetes, and heart disease

Shift work, mandatory overtime, and high call volumes further compound these effects, disrupting circadian rhythms and negatively impacting family functioning and relationships. Like other public safety professionals, dispatchers often report difficulties “turning off” after work, emotional numbing, and strain in personal relationships—hallmarks of chronic occupational trauma exposure.

Despite these realities, dispatchers are still classified as administrative personnel, limiting their access to:

- Public safety retirement systems
- Specialized mental health resources
- Funding appropriated for first responder populations
- Recognition and protections afforded to other first responders

This misclassification creates a gap between the actual risk and responsibility of the role and the support and recognition provided.

Reclassifying dispatchers as public safety professionals would:

1. Align policy with evidence regarding occupational risk and mental health impact
2. Improve access to appropriate mental health services and peer support systems
3. Enhance recruitment and retention in a field currently facing critical shortages
4. Acknowledge dispatchers as integral members of the emergency response system

From a clinical perspective, failing to recognize dispatchers as public safety professionals perpetuates systemic inequity and undermines efforts to address occupational trauma. These professionals are not clerical staff—they are frontline responders operating through voice, cognition, and emotional regulation under extreme pressure.

In closing, I urge you to support this bill. Reclassification is a necessary and evidence-based step toward protecting the mental health, well-being, and sustainability of a workforce that plays a critical role in public safety.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Teri Forst, LPC-S, MAC, NCC, NERPSCC, CFRC

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: (907) 786-8900

Kyle.hall@anchorageak.gov

Anchorage Fire Department

Frances Robinson | Dispatcher – 911 Telecommunicator

frances.robinson@anchorageak.gov

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

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Frances.Robinson@anchorageak.gov

PulsePoint  

SUZANNE HALL

██████████ • Sterling, AK 99672
Phone: 907-262-4453

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

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:

7CA1378DA086410...

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

JUNEAU POLICE DEPARTMENT

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DEREK BOS
CHIEF OF POLICE

Alaska's Capital City

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April 1, 2026

Representative Carolyn Hall
House of Representatives – Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street, Room 434
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representative Hall,

I am writing in support of classifying public safety dispatchers and call takers into a protective service class along with our police officers, troopers, other peace officers, EMS providers and firefighters.

As a member of the Joint State Board for the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) and the National Emergency Number Association (NENA), I have an obligation to call attention to and advance this profession. These two non-profit organizations provide standards, training and certifications for public safety dispatching, 9-1-1 operations and related technical issues. As the public safety manager at the Juneau Police Department, I am seeking ways to recruit and retain staff in this very difficult profession. Recognizing the work that our staff performs and categorically aligning them with other public safety professionals is appropriate and needed.

Public safety dispatchers and call takers are not clerical staff. They answer 9-1-1 and other emergency calls for service. Many lives have been saved because of our 9-1-1 professionals' dedication to public safety and service. They are the first of the first responders who assist individuals in crisis and play a vital role in almost every emergency.

In Juneau, our public safety dispatchers provide emergency services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, operating with our other first responders to ensure our community and visitors receive critical life-saving services.

Most emergencies start with a call to 9-1-1 or another number answered by people trained to handle emergency calls for service. Every call type – whether a robbery, barricaded armed subject, CPR in progress, domestic violence assault, search and rescue, serious motor vehicle collision or mudslide – demands professional, independent and effective action from the dispatcher.

In addition to sending and coordinating resources, dispatchers provide safety instructions, moral support and guide callers through medical pre-arrival instructions.

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They often stay on the phone for prolonged periods of time as field units are transported to remote areas. ***This lifeline created by the dispatchers sustains lives.***

Dispatchers from our communications center have been on the phone with people who committed suicide *while they were on the phone with them*. They answer calls from mothers who woke to find their infant deceased. A man called 9-1-1 from inside a house fire screaming, to be found later within the residence after succumbing to the event. There were survivors of a remote aircraft crash who called in when others onboard died. Dispatchers process every call regardless of the seriousness using acute problem solving and exceptional communication skills.

These calls and experiences generate a tremendous amount of stress for the dispatcher, like they would for any other first responder. Dispatchers hold it all in until they can walk away. They have to return for their next shift, if they don't, there would be no one to answer the calls. These requirements are very different from those in the clerical and administrative fields. Dispatchers deserve mental and physical wellness support throughout their careers and into retirement.

In Juneau, our dispatchers undergo an intensive 7-month training program before released to work independently. The program includes classroom academy sessions and on the job training with an APCO certified communications training officer. Our dispatchers are certified emergency medical dispatchers (EMD) through APCO and hold licenses from the State of Alaska Department of Health and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) as emergency medical dispatchers. Alaska Administrative Code (7 AAC 26.810) affirms emergency medical dispatchers, like paramedics and EMTs, must receive proper training, continuing education and formal oversight from a medical director. All Juneau communications center employees are certified in the National Incident Management / Command System. This is necessary as dispatchers are usually the first person responsible for a scene and manage the response, logistics and planning until someone takes over.

Dispatchers in Juneau are multidisciplinary, serving law enforcement (police, troopers, probation/parole and federal law enforcement), medical, fire, search and rescue, mobile crisis teams and mobile integrated health. Our partnerships, workload and technologies continue to expand every year. For example, we now work with 9-8-8 in Alaska requiring dispatchers to assess circumstances and determine appropriate responses to mental health crises.

Our public safety dispatchers use many highly technical systems such as 9-1-1, phone, GIS/mapping and computer aided dispatch systems that are unique to our field. Dispatchers are resourceful and often use tools and technology such as "pinging" the location of a 9-1-1 caller who is lost or unable to speak. Dispatchers are required to use

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these systems so well, that they can enter calls, change statuses and retrieve information without hesitation. Every second counts in many emergency situations and pausing to think or search for information can delay critical assistance. Police officers, firefighters and medics depend on information to be absolutely accurate when it goes over the air or transfers into CAD or other technical systems like Fire Station Alerting.

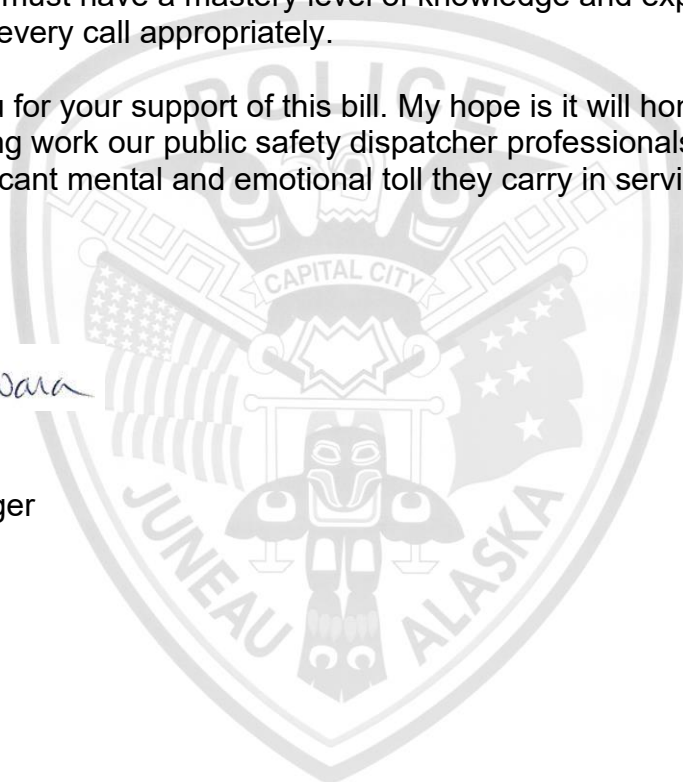
Mastering the constantly changing technology needed requires dedication and determination. Internal systems change frequently and dispatchers must apply themselves to stay current, efficient and accurately process information. These are not clerical tasks our dispatchers are performing. Dispatchers are highly skilled communicators and must have a mastery level of knowledge and experience with the systems to process every call appropriately.

In closing, thank you for your support of this bill. My hope is it will honor the highly specialized, lifesaving work our public safety dispatcher professionals perform each day, as well as the significant mental and emotional toll they carry in service to our communities.

Sincerely,



Erann Kalwara
Public Safety Manager



The following is my letter of testimony in support of HOUSE BILL 234 for public safety dispatchers/call takers reclassification. This profession needs to be a protected class, recognized at a national and state level, as public safety **first responders**.

It is unreasonable to classify my duties, work hours, and responsibilities with that of clerical or administration support staff. It is my calm voice when a caller is begging, screaming, bleeding, panicking, and desperate for help. It is me that must process, type, question, glean the circumstances, nature, and dangers of the call. The information needs to be typed as a call for service and then dispatched via radio to the officers and/or responders.

The two words that best describe this profession are URGENCY and DEDICATION. No other occupation is more overlooked, unnoticed, and discounted as that of the dispatcher. When I come to work every single one of my phone calls in my mind going to be CPR, ACTIVE SHOOTER, A PLANE CRASH, until it is proven otherwise. I prepare mentally for this everyday when I put on my headset.

28 years ago, I heard and applied the BACKPACK STRESS TOOL to my career. When I leave work, I take my backpack off that is full of all the stress for the day, bad calls, mean and rude people, all the tension and trauma, and leave this stress backpack at the door. I don't take it home with me. It has worked for the most part. I've cried at home, cried in the car, relived my own fathers passing when dispatching to CPR in progress. There are triggers and I can't say that I've never used alcohol to help me sleep or as a crutch to find relief. I've seen good dispatchers walk away from an entire career because of PTSD.

Let me introduce myself and tell you about 4 specific phone calls (of hundreds) in my 28 year career that were impactful and significant. From lasting trauma and voices pleading, I will never forget, they will remain with me my entire life:

Alaina Anderson

- 1997 State Troopers **Police Dispatcher 6 years**, dispatching AST for Mat Su Borough, Girdwood, Talkeetna, and Glennallen.
- 2004 Palmer Police Department **Medical, Police & Fire Dispatcher 19 years**, dispatching Mat Su Borough Fire & EMS and Palmer Police Officers simultaneously.
- 2024 Anchorage Airport **Police & Fire Dispatcher 1.5 years** & my current employer

1. AIRPLANE CRASH – 911 call from the passenger of a small airplane that crashed in trees in Big Lake. He was broken and, in the wreckage, trapped and called 911. I remained on the line with him throughout the response. Providing reassurance that help is on the way....BUT over an hour away! I listened to him screaming and

pleading and in pure agony. His friend and pilot was most likely deceased but I encouraged him to yell out to his friend. "HANG ON" "DON'T GIVE UP" "KEEP BREATHING" Whatever he could do to encourage the non-responsive pilot to hear his words. Using his pain I kept telling him the pain meant that he was alive. It broke my heart every time to hear his screaming. The outcome and the only reason I know is because of a news article in the Frontiersman: The pilot was in fact deceased. My caller had two broken legs, broken ankles, ruptured spleen and he was photographed with his family. It made the experience precious to me. Knowing I was there for him, got him help and talked him through something that changed both of our lives.

2. She didn't know she was pregnant **BABY DELIVERY** - During graveshift I got a 911 caller, a young man, who said his girlfriend was sitting on the honeypot and woke him up and said "HOLD THIS". He said, "I think this is a baby's head coming out of her." I asked him how far along she is and he said they didn't know she was pregnant. At a semi-remote cabin with no electricity a baby was delivered by the light of a lantern and this young couple experienced childbirth. I will never forget giving him the instruction to....lay her flat on her back and remove all her clothing from the waist down. He innocently asked, "even her underwear?". He was very nervous and shy. He followed all of my instructions perfectly and used fishing line to tie the umbilical cord. However, mom didn't stop bleeding after delivery and I had to give him instructions to stimulate the nipples. Both of them did great. Me and my partner dispatched an ambulance and rescue and requested Lifemed. Because there was no prenatal care, the mom & baby were transported via helicopter to the hospital. As the entire call played out and he and I worked this emergency together, this young man never cussed. That is my most vivid memory, he never used a single expletive. He was courageous and brave and I never got to tell him that. I will never forget the call, the boy, the mother pushing, or the baby crying in the background. It brings tears to my eyes remembering I was there for them.
3. **SEMI TRUCK LOADED WITH REFRIGERATED METHANE** single vehicle accident on the Parks Highway north of Trapper Creek. The 911 caller reported the semi had rolled over and the driver was ejected and something was leaking from the truck. The caller gave me the placard number and I determined it was refrigerated methane, a significant safety concern and potential exposure to hazardous materials. This accident involved multiple agencies and simultaneous radio traffic, and multiple people calling 911. Prearrival instructions. The notification of the Alaska Railroad because it was near the crossing. Also, the notification to Department of Environmental conservation because of the leaking product and diesel fuel into the tundra. There was a military convoy that was stopped and I coordinated with them to stop both northbound and southbound traffic until the fire department arrived. The driver of the semi was being treated by several motorists that had medical training that happened to be on scene. The call, the radio traffic,

the coordination was one of the most complex I've ever experienced. It earned me the Hero of the Year Award by the City of Palmer in 2005.

4. I CAME TO FIX THE KITCHEN SINK – THIS GUY JUST SHOT EVERYONE. The 911 caller was whispering help, help, help, this guy just shot everyone and I think my friend is dead. My caller was outside and hiding in the woods. He had been to his friend "Natalies" to fix her sink and she invited him to stay for dinner. He was preparing moose meat when another couple, he didn't know, arrived. He said everything was fine one minute and the next thing he knew this guy was shooting. My caller said he ran out the door and was hiding but heard more gunfire in the garage but now it was quiet. Then, he said he could hear moaning and groaning and someone saying help. His friend "Natalie" was still alive. On a cold dark winter night he was begging me to GET EVERYONE HERE, she needed medics, they needed police, he said people are probably dead. He said it was silent in the residence besides his friend in agony. He stayed on the phone with me relaying what he looked like, what he was wearing so he wouldn't be mistaken for the shooter, and he went back to the porch against my warning him that the danger may not be over. He was begging for help, pleading for his friend, relaying to her that help was coming. He described the shooter, the gun, the circumstances leading up to the shooting. I was relaying the information but the response felt like hours. BEGGING ME, as if I could actually speed the response time up, it was painful listening to a grown man going from crying, begging, angry, and then desperate. He was so relieved when law enforcement arrived on scene he ran from the porch straight to the officers, running with the phone in his hand. It was very dangerous and tense but because I relayed his descriptors, his location, and his precise clothing description the officers told me they knew right away he was the caller, that he was unarmed, and they secured him to a safe location. I replay what if I hadn't got that information and he ran at them and they mistook the phone for a gun and I got him shot. Did I give him the instructions on what to do when the police arrived. We listed to the call at a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing and it was determined that I did tell him, KEEP YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR WHEN YOU APPROCH THE POLICE WHEN THEY ARRIVE.

Remember this airplane crash victim, this newborn baby, this major highway crash, and this shooting survivor and reclassify the profession of DISPATCHERS and recognize us as public safety workers and **first responders**. We are not clerks, office, or administrative staff, what we do is critical, we *are* the first on scene and we save lives.

Sincerely,

Alaina M. Anderson
Emergency Services Dispatcher