

Anchorage Fire Department

Matthew Carlson | Firefighter Paramedic | Fire Station 4 |
matthew.carlson@anchorageak.gov

March 2026

House Labor and Commerce Committee:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Best Regards,



Matthew Carlson
Firefighter/Paramedic

Station 4, C-shift

Anchorage Fire Department
100 E. 4th Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 727-8930

Matthew.carlson@anchorageak.gov

Dear House Labor and Commerce Committee,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kristine Whitford
Lead Dispatcher/EMT
Anchorage Fire Department
(907)301-3401

March 3, 2026

Lorrie Mott
Valdez Police Department
PO Box 307
Valdez, AK 99686
lmott@pd.valdezak.gov

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

Re: Support for House Joint Resolution No. 38

Dear Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

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

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

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

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

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

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

Respectfully,

Lorrie Mott



City of Homer

www.cityofhomer-ak.gov

Police Department

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March 6, 2026

To Whom It May Concern,

I have been a Public Safety Telecommunicator (aka Dispatcher) for over 11 years at the Homer Alaska Police Department. I dispatch Police, Fire and EMS for our City.

I have helped a woman deliver a baby over the phone. I have heard the last gasps of someone dying. I have listened to the screams of multiple people after discovering their loved one deceased. I have provided CPR instructions to multiple people after finding someone not conscious/not breathing but still save able. I have gotten people out of burning buildings. I have helped parents locate missing children. I have helped officers arrest drug dealers, pedophiles, thieves, domestic violence abusers and many more. Every day when I come in to work I never know what is going to happen, but I make sure I am ready for anything.

I want to express my support for the Enhancing First Response Act which reclassifies public safety telecommunicators as a protective service occupation.

My colleagues and I are the FIRST first responders. We take the call, initiate lifesaving measures, dispatch the responders and orchestrate the chaos. We deserve to be classified as first responders.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tracie Whitaker
Dispatcher II

Alicia Cheeseman | Public Safety Dispatcher

March 5, 2026

House Labor and Commerce Committee,

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

My name is Alicia Cheeseman, and I serve as a public safety dispatcher supporting police responses in Anchorage. From the moment a 911 call is answered, dispatchers are the first point of contact for people experiencing emergencies. Long before responders arrive on scene, we are already working to assess the situation, gather critical information, and provide guidance that can save lives.

Every call begins with someone experiencing what is often the worst moment of their life. As dispatchers, we must remain calm, focused, and methodical while guiding callers through chaotic and emotional situations. Within minutes, we obtain accurate locations, determine the nature of the emergency, relay essential information to responding units, and coordinate police, fire, and EMS resources to ensure the fastest and safest response possible. The safety of responding officers, as well as the outcomes for patients and victims, often depends on the accuracy and clarity of the information we provide.

Police dispatchers are trained to manage a wide range of emergencies and provide critical support to victims while officers are responding. We help callers stay safe by guiding them to secure locations, advising them to lock doors or remain hidden when necessary, and keeping them calm during frightening and unpredictable situations. At the same time, we gather essential details such as suspect descriptions, weapons involved, and direction of travel, relaying that information in real time to responding officers. By maintaining communication with victims and coordinating responding units, dispatchers help ensure officers arrive prepared and that victims receive the assistance they need as quickly and safely as possible.

Recognizing telecommunicators as first responders is more than a title change. It acknowledges the critical role dispatchers play in the emergency response system and opens the door to additional training opportunities, grant funding for dispatch centers, access to wellness resources, and potential retirement benefits that reflect the demands and stresses of the job.

House Joint Resolution No. 38 sends a clear message that the State of Alaska values and supports the work of its public safety telecommunicators. Dispatchers are often the

unseen first link in the chain of survival, and formal recognition of this role is an important step forward.

I respectfully urge you to support House Joint Resolution No. 38 and help ensure that telecommunicators receive the recognition and resources appropriate for the vital role they play in protecting our communities.

Respectfully,

Alicia Cheeseman



MATCOM Public Safety
Dispatch Center
City of Wasilla



Mary Buchman
1800 E Parks Highway
Wasilla, AK 99654
mbuchman@cityofwasilla.gov

March 4, 2026

House Labor and Commerce Committee:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Respectfully,

Mary E. Buchman
Assistant Manager
MatCom Public Safety Dispatch



City of Homer

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Police Department

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police@cityofhomer-ak.gov

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To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express support for HJR38. I have been in law enforcement since January of 2012 and a police officer in the state of Alaska since August of 2012. Throughout my career, dispatch has been the first point of contact for a significant portion of contacts and incidents. The dispatchers I have worked with have been critical in providing me necessary information that has directly kept me safe while conducting my job.

Additionally, dispatchers often receive emergency calls in which they hear people actively experiencing the worst moment of their life, be it their family home burning to the ground, loved one experiencing a medical emergency or talking a suspect out of a residence after they had just killed someone. I have seen my dispatchers deal with the most extreme of calls followed by the most mundane and perform with exceptional professionalism. I know that when a shots fired or officer down call comes over the radio, it is not only police that have their hearts jump into their throats. As a police officer, I see and am an integral part of the resolution to these extreme calls. Dispatch is not afforded that luxury. Often it is our dispatchers that experience the intense emotional buildup for an emergency call for service and then must wait, sometimes hours, for a resolution that may not come on their shift.

Our dispatchers experience as many traumatic cases, calls and events as any of the traditionally classified first responders with almost none of the resolution, support, or acknowledgement as they should. I urge this legislature to pass this resolution and further push for the passage of the Enhancing First Response Act (S.725) or similar bill to reclassify public safety telecommunicators as a protective service occupation under the Standard Occupational Classification system.

Respectfully,

Patrol Officer Charles Lee

Anchorage Fire Department - Retiree

Craig Johnston | Retired Engineer - Fire Station 11 | ccbjohnston@hotmail.com

Reg: Dispatcher Reclassification

I am writing in support of reclassification of public safety dispatchers as first responders.

The FIRST people in the emergency services are dispatchers. Literally the initiative, organization, command structure, and resources sent to every emergency in the United States starts with them. The typical response includes skill sets unique to public safety dispatchers. There are no fill-in positions, no back up plan, and no one can replace them without significant time and training. This is somewhat akin to Air Traffic Controllers. The moving parts, and the responsibilities are complex, demanding, and unforgiving.

Today in my medium size city (Anchorage, AK) there are 4 dispatchers working their assigned 12-hour shifts, one of which will be working an 18-hour shift (mandatory overtime for short staff) Imagine, if you will, how many life and death decisions, actions, resources, and calls occur between 8 AM and 2 AM...

These men and women will field hundreds of 911 calls, decipher the often frantic, panicked, screaming on the other end of the line. While guiding the caller on dealing with the fire, cardiac arrest, or little Johnny with his finger jammed in a locked door, they operate computer systems on 8 screens as the mechanism that gets the police officers, fire-fighters, and paramedics involved in "saving the day".

Confirm:

- Where (Address, Alley, Cross Street, Highway, Which Trail)
- What happened (Assault, Fall, Vehicle Accident, Fire, Injuries)
- Who (Male, Female, Age (child or adult), medical history)
- When (did this happen right now, a few days ago, time lapse)
- What's needed (Police Officer, Fire-fighter (multiple), paramedics, Mobile Crisis Team)
- Who can respond (Which units are available to go on this call and how far out are they)
- Who needs to be informed (Utility Companies, Troopers, Military, Railroad)

All simultaneously while calmly giving life saving instructions to the scared, frantic, and agitated caller on the other end of the phone.

Typing, tracking, talking, and taking care of the citizens we serve.

Dispatchers guide the entire response smoothly in a few moments, for a simple call. Then answer another incoming emergency right after ending the previous call. For many calls, the operation requires much, much more. Imagine car crashes, cardiac arrests, shootings, and plane crashes. How many puzzle pieces does one dispatcher have to assemble perfectly every time?

I should qualify my opinion lest I sound biased. One of the people I and my wife have adopted is a dispatcher, and I was a professional career fire fighter for the city of Anchorage. The perspective I hope to share is what I have witnessed from inside the system. I responded to those dispatches for 20 years and have spent many hours in dispatch with these amazing humans. I have witnessed the toll the fire service takes on ALL of its responders. The physical (yes dispatchers undergo physical stress) and emotional strain, Post Traumatic Stress, how my peers perspectives changed over the course of their careers.

I had the good fortune to retire after 30 years of government service, with a pension and medical insurance. I have learned to sleep, accept the losses, and slow some of the hyper vigilance that is ingrained from being a first responder. And I am witness to what occurs to the first cog in the machine that saves human life. 911 Dispatchers are the FIRST, first responders, and can no longer be treated as secondary.

Sincerely,

Craig Johnston

AFD - Retired Engineer



Eagle River, AK

99577

Anchorage Fire Department

Frances Robinson | Dispatcher – 911 Telecommunicator

frances.robinson@anchorageak.gov

March 4, 2026

House Labor and Commerce Committee Members:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Respectfully,

Frances Robinson



Frances Robinson

911 Telecommunicator

Anchorage Fire Department

100 E. 4th Ave

Anchorage, Alaska 99501

wk 907.267.4950

fax 907.267-4989

Frances.Robinson@anchorageak.gov

PulsePoint  

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

support HJR038

From Jacqueline Davis [REDACTED]
Date Thu 3/5/2026 10:58 AM
To Maya Narang <Maya.Narang@akleg.gov>

Dear Members of the Alaska State Legislature,

I am writing to respectfully urge you to support legislation that would officially classify emergency dispatchers as first responders in the State of Alaska.

Emergency dispatchers serve as the critical first point of contact during emergencies. When Alaskans dial 911 in moments of crisis-whether due to a medical emergency, fire, accident, or crime-it is the dispatcher who answers the call, assesses the situation, and initiates the lifesaving response. Dispatchers provide immediate guidance to callers, coordinate police, fire, and medical personnel, and remain on the line with victims until help arrives. Recognizing emergency dispatchers as first responders would acknowledge the essential role they play in Alaska's public safety system. It would also help ensure they receive appropriate professional recognition, training opportunities, mental health resources and support commensurate with the demands of their work. I respectfully ask you to support efforts to formally designate emergency dispatchers as first responders in Alaska. This recognition would be a meaningful step toward honoring the dedication, professionalism, and critical service they provide to Alaskans every day.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Jacqueline Davis
Dispatcher
Homer Police Dept.
907-235-3150
907-235-3151 fax



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

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

To Whom It May Concern,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Respectfully,

Jessica Roper

Public Safety Dispatcher - SPSCC

Soldotna, Alaska

Jessica Roper

Public Safety Dispatcher I

Soldotna Public Safety Communications Center



Kenai Peninsula Borough

144 N. Binkley St. Soldotna, AK 99669

kpb.us

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March 6, 2026

To Whom this May Concern,

Speaking on behalf of myself and my colleagues as 911 dispatchers for the Homer Police Department, I strongly support the Enhancing First Response Act which reclassifies public safety telecommunications as a protective service occupation.

Having worked in this career collectively for 24 years, I can testify that we are first responders. From the very second, we answer 911, (and in Homer it can be from an administrative line as well) we hear the screams for help, and begin CPR with lifesaving measures, we instruct people to go out of a burning house, we are the calm in the chaos. We also work closely with other agencies to assist them with calls.

I would like to share with you a personal example of a call I took about a week ago. I had 911 hang up. I called back the number, a male answered the phone, and was having difficulty breathing, because of a propane leak in his house. I sent the medics and officers to the residence. I instructed him to get outside to fresh air until the medics could get to him. Two days later, I saw the male that had been the victim in that call at a local store. I overheard him stating to the clerk that the doctor in the ER told him he had not gotten help, within another minute he may not have survived. This is a prime example of being a first responder along with the medics and the officers that responded.

Over the years with my fellow dispatchers, we have heard people take their last breathes, hear choking baby's breath again, instruct people to get to higher ground because of a possible tsunami after an earthquake, help officers find next of kin after a traffic fatality. Speak with the Medical Examiners Office after someone has committed suicide and send them photos of the scene. These are just a few small examples of what we do.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jona Lee Focht
Public Safety Dispatcher II



MATCOM Public Safety
Dispatch Center
City of Wasilla



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March 4, 2026

Representative Kevin McCabe
Alaska State Legislature
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska

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

Dear Representative McCabe,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Respectfully submitted,

Lori Criqui

Lori Ann Criqui
MATCOM Communications Manager
City of Wasilla

Re: Support for HJR 38 and Recognition of Public Safety Telecommunicators as First Responders

I am writing in strong support of House Joint Resolution 38 introduced by Representative Hall during the Thirty-Fourth Legislature of the State of Alaska.

I have served as a public safety dispatcher and supervisor in Alaska for 19 years. During that time, I have answered thousands of calls from people experiencing the worst moments of their lives.

I have felt the heartbreak of parents losing their baby during preterm labor. I've provided CPR instructions to a son begging his father to live for 35 minutes before EMS arrived. I've spent hours talking with veterans and young people, trying to convince them not to take their own lives. I once answered a call from a man reporting, "There's a dead body at this address," only to learn he had shot himself moments after hanging up with me.

I've calmed an 8-year-old girl hiding in a locked van while her father beat her mother inside the house. I've heard the wails of parents who woke to find their daughter frozen outside their home. I've tracked and texted with a kidnapping victim for 25 minutes until Alaska State Troopers were able to stop the vehicle. I also handled the AST helicopter crash in 2013 and multiple officer-involved shootings, hearing the shots and the cries of "Officer shot" echo over the radio. These are just a scratch on the surface of the calls my coworkers and I experience every single day.

We serve as the first point of contact and an integral part of the emergency response system. From the moment a call comes in, we gather critical information, calm terrified callers, and coordinate the response that can mean the difference between life and death.

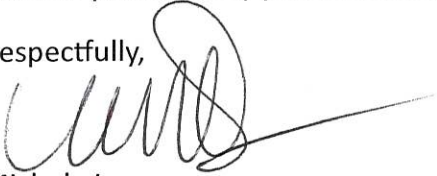
Public Safety Telecommunicators are trained in emergency medical, fire, and police dispatch protocols, crisis intervention, hostage negotiation, abduction response, and split-second decision-making under extreme pressure. Our role requires composure, skill, excellent communication, and resilience. Yet despite the responsibility and psychological toll of our work, we are still classified at the federal level as clerical workers under the Standard Occupational Classification system.

I recently returned from Washington, DC, where I met with Congressman Begich and Senators Murkowski and Sullivan, who recognize the importance of this bill and have pledged their support. Recognition under the Enhancing First Response Act would correct this outdated classification, strengthen morale, improve retention, and help ensure communities across Alaska continue to receive the emergency response they depend on.

After 19 years of service, I am proud of the work my coworkers and I do every day and the lives we impact. I respectfully ask that our profession be recognized for what it truly is: a first responder role that carries immense responsibility, emotional weight, and public trust.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue and for your continued support of Alaska's public safety professionals.

Respectfully,



Michele Lecours
TAC/Dispatch Supervisor
MATCOM Public Safety Dispatch
907-352-5454



04 March 2026

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of House Joint Resolution 38, the Enhancing First Responder Act.

911 dispatchers, often referred to as emergency communications specialists, perform duties that are fundamentally different from clerical work. Their role is an operational public-safety function that

Unlike clerical staff, 911 dispatchers directly support emergency response and require specialized training, rapid decision-making, exposure to high-stress, and traumatic situations. We must make rapid, high-stakes decisions that directly affect public safety and responder safety.

As a Call Taker, I assisted a caller who came upon a child trapped under an ATV and turning blue due to lack of oxygen. We worked together and provided her with immediate medical assistance, ultimately saving her life despite the caller being in panic mode.

During events such as active crimes, fires, medical crises, or large-scale incidents, dispatchers coordinate multiple responding units, track evolving information, and maintain communication between field responders and command staff. This role differs significantly from administrative record-keeping or office support functions.

During the Nov 2018 earthquake, we worked to create a makeshift control center tracking borough outage, school structure statuses, and focused on the elderly requiring power for breathing equipment while performing other mission essential duties.

Dispatchers routinely hear traumatic events as they unfold, including violence, severe injuries, and life-threatening emergencies. Administrative staff do not experience the same psychological stress and trauma exposure similar as first responders as they are not directly involved in crisis situations.

We all have our share of distressing event to deal with. A couple lingering incidents for me include a caller who was experiencing an asthma attack and died while waiting for help; I often think of her. I also dealt with two suicides in a span of 12 days last year. An elderly male told me he was going to kill himself and gave me directions on how to get to him before his wife returned home. He refused to listen to me, left the line open, cocked his shotgun and shot himself. I stayed on the line listening in hopes of him changing his mind. I then heard the racking of shotgun, the shot, and what I imagine his body collapsing. I then heard the sounds of post-mortem muscle activity – something that has stayed with me.

Our duties as 911 Dispatchers/Call Taking involve specialized emergency training, real-time decision-making, management of critical incidents, and repeated exposure to traumatic events. These responsibilities align more closely with public-safety / first-responder support roles than with clerical or administrative classifications.

Please recognize public safety telecommunicators as first responders and pass the Enhancing First Response Act.

Renee Jensen

House Labor and Commerce Committee,

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

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

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

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

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

Best,

Sarah

HJR038

From: Scott Larson [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, March 4, 2026 4:02 PM
To: Maya Narang <Maya.Narang@akleg.gov>
Subject: RE: HJR038

Hello Ms. Narang,

I wish to voice my support regarding recognizing police/fire/medical dispatchers as first responders!

I have been a paramedic for 18 years. They may not deal with the callers IN THE FLESH.. but they absolutely deserve the notoriety.. I've heard many dispatch recording calls for service... they absolutely deserve this status. I support them 1000%. These humans are solid..

kindest Regards,
 Scott Larson, NRP

SUZANNE HALL

PO Box 857 • Sterling, AK 99672

Phone: 907-262-4453

March 4, 2026

Dear Member of Congress,

My name is Suzanne Hall, and I am writing to urge you to support the Enhancing First Response Act and to formally recognize public safety telecommunicators as first responders under federal law.

For the past 24 years, I have served as a 911 telecommunicator. Before that, I spent three years as a patrol officer and two years working as a medic. My career has been dedicated to public safety in nearly every form. I was also married to a state trooper, so both professionally and personally, I have lived a life deeply connected to emergency response and the sacrifices that come with it.

Despite the critical role 911 professionals play in emergency response, federal classification still places telecommunicators in the same category as clerical workers. Anyone who has spent even one shift in a 911 center knows that description could not be further from the truth.

Every call we answer may be someone's worst day. We guide terrified parents through CPR on their child. We talk victims through hiding from violent attackers. We coordinate responses for house fires, fatal crashes, suicides, overdoses, and officer-involved emergencies. Often, we are the very first voice people hear in the most frightening moments of their lives.

We are trained to make life-or-death decisions in seconds, to calm chaos, to gather critical information, and to dispatch help quickly and accurately. While responders are en route, we remain on the line providing lifesaving instructions and emotional support. In many situations, lives are saved before police, fire, or EMS ever arrive on scene.

The work carries a heavy emotional toll. Telecommunicators experience repeated exposure to trauma, crisis, and tragedy while working long hours in high-stress environments. Yet because of our outdated federal classification, many telecommunicators lack access to the recognition, resources, and mental health support afforded to other first responders.

The Enhancing First Response Act is a necessary step to correct this long-standing oversight. Recognizing public safety telecommunicators as first responders acknowledges the reality of the work we do every day and helps ensure that those who serve in this role receive the respect and support they deserve.

After twenty-seven years dedicated to public safety—from the street, to the ambulance, to the 911 console—I can say with certainty that emergency response does not begin when lights and sirens arrive. It begins the moment someone answers the phone.

I respectfully urge you to support the Enhancing First Response Act and work toward full federal recognition of public safety telecommunicators as first responders.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to the safety of the communities we all serve.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Hall
Sterling, AK
911 Telecommunicator (24 years of service)

Letter of Support for House Joint Resolution 38

Urging Recognition of Public Safety Telecommunicators as First Responders

March 10, 2026

Letter of Support for House Joint Resolution 38 urging recognition of public safety telecommunicators as first responders.

The Honorable Members of the Alaska State Legislature

State Capitol, Juneau, Alaska 99801

Introduction

Dear Members of the Legislature,

As a public safety telecommunicator, I am proud to lend my voice in strong support of House Joint Resolution 38, currently before the 34th Legislature in its second session. This important resolution urges the United States Congress to recognize public safety telecommunicators as first responders and advocates for the passage of the Enhancing First Response Act.

Role and Responsibilities of Public Safety Telecommunicators

Every day, we receive, evaluate, and prioritize emergency calls, determining jurisdictions and expediting response with law enforcement, fire, emergency medical, search and rescue, and specialty response units. We are often the first point of contact during marine, aviation, and land-based emergencies as well as environmental disasters and terrorist attacks, taking the initial calls, dispatching resources and alerting appropriate authorities. We facilitate mutual aid requests that involve multi-agency and military resources, ensuring that the right help reaches those in need, regardless of the complexity or urgency of the situation.

Our responsibilities demand that we maintain multiple certifications and commit to constant, ongoing training in emergency medical procedures, incident management systems, and law enforcement information systems. We utilize advanced Emergency Medical Dispatch protocols, including providing CPR guidance and lifesaving pre-arrival instructions to callers during medical emergencies. We also provide critical tracking and accountability for responder safety.

Impact and Importance of the Profession

Far more than clerical workers, we as public safety telecommunicators are often the lifeline in moments of crisis, communicating with individuals facing severe distress, harm, fear, or injury. By drawing upon our training and experience, we discern critical information that can make all the difference during an emergency. The speed, quality, and effectiveness of our response frequently determines the outcome of a call—sometimes serving as the pivotal factor between life and death. Without our expertise and unwavering dedication, achieving true public safety would simply not be possible.

Challenges Faced by Telecommunicators

Like other protective service jobs, our work requires extended hours and frequent shift changes to maintain 24/7 emergency communications. We often handle distressing calls and rarely get closure on cases. The demands of public service can affect our relationships and mental health.

The Need for Federal Recognition

Despite the essential nature and breadth of our work, we are not currently recognized as first responders at the federal level. This lack of recognition does not reflect the reality of our responsibilities and contributions. House Joint Resolution 38 seeks to correct this oversight by urging the United States Congress to formally acknowledge our profession as first responders and to pass the Enhancing First Response Act, which would ensure that we receive the recognition, resources, and support commensurate with our role.

Benefits of Recognition

Recognizing public safety telecommunicators as first responders would not only honor our commitment and sacrifice, but also help improve recruitment, retention, and morale within this crucial field. It would provide access to additional training and benefits that are essential for our well-being and for the communities we serve.

Conclusion

I respectfully urge you to support House Joint Resolution 38 and advocate for its swift passage. Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to the safety and well-being of all Alaskans.

Sincerely,

Tobias E. Summerhayes

 Healy, AK 99743

Recognition of Public Safety Dispatchers as First Responders

From Wilkins, Hannah G [REDACTED]
Date Wed 3/11/2026 11:09 AM
To Maya Narang <Maya.Narang@akleg.gov>

Hello,

I am writing to advocate for the formal recognition of public safety dispatchers as first responders under federal law. While dispatchers may not respond physically to emergency scenes, they are often the true first point of contact during a crisis. In many cases, they are the very first voice a caller hears when seeking help, and their actions in those critical moments directly influence the safety and outcomes of emergency responses.

Public safety dispatchers manage life-threatening situations in real time. They gather critical information from distressed callers, provide lifesaving instructions such as CPR guidance and bleeding control, coordinate police, fire, and emergency medical resources, and ensure responders receive accurate, timely information before arriving on scene. Their ability to remain calm, make rapid decisions, and prioritize multiple emergencies simultaneously is essential to the effectiveness of the entire emergency response system.

Dispatchers also experience many of the same psychological stresses faced by field responders. They listen to traumatic incidents as they unfold, often while managing multiple emergencies at once, yet they rarely receive the same recognition or support systems afforded to other first responders. Recognizing dispatchers as first responders acknowledges both the critical role they play and the realities of the work they perform. Their work requires the same level of professionalism, resilience, and composure that we expect from all emergency responders.

Public safety depends on a coordinated system in which every role is vital. Dispatchers are the central link that connects the public to emergency services, ensuring that help arrives quickly and that responders are prepared when they do. For these reasons, it is both appropriate and necessary to recognize public safety dispatchers as first responders.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to strengthening our emergency response systems. I appreciate your consideration of this important issue.

Respectfully,

Hannah Wilkins

Hannah Wilkins
Public Safety Dispatcher
Alaska Region Communication Center (ARCC) Located
in Denali National Park and Preserve 907-683-9555
(dispatch)
907-683-9640 (fax)

Anchorage Fire Department

Andrea Harding | Dispatch Center-Fire Station 12 | andrea Harding@anchorageak.gov

Regarding: Reclassification of 911 Dispatchers

I would like to speak in support of HJR38, on the reclassification of 911 Dispatchers from “Office and Administrative Support” to First Responders. As a 911 Dispatcher for over 20 years, we are a part of many emergency fire and medical communications in the first responder’s system.

911 Dispatchers are not only a lifeline to the officers, firefighters, and medical responders; we are a critical and vital part of the live-saving system. We are trained to give CPR instructions for all ages from newborn to adult, pregnant patients, and patients with tracheostomy. Instructions are taught for choking patients of all ages as well, infants to adults, as well as pregnant patients. We are trained to give recovery instructions for unconscious people, control bleeding instructions, burn management, as well as delivering a baby. 911 Dispatchers are trained in Wildland Fire Evacuations, Sinking Vehicle, Person on Fire, Person Trapped in a Structure Fire, as well as instructions during an Avalanche, Mudslide, Landslide, Land Slip, Building/Bridge Collapse, Industrial Entrapment, Train Derailments, Aircraft Emergencies, and Swift Water Rescues.

On top of all the technical training for the bigger events, 911 Dispatchers handle all the daily emergencies; abdominal pain, allergic reaction, breathing problems, chest pain, diabetic problem, cold/heat exposure, head pain, overdose, seizures, stroke, assaults, drowning, vehicle accidents, animal attacks, alarms, lifting assistance, electrical hazards, gas leaks, suicides and mental health clients.

While we are trained in knowing what to do and what to tell people to do in all these emergencies, the real talent, the true challenge is getting the 911 caller, who is panicked, terrified, and scared to execute the instructions given. The ability of getting a petrified person to do CPR when seconds count or stop the bleeding of a gunshot wound, how to stay safe in a burning structure if they are unable to get out, or deliver a baby in the back of a car is proficiency and aptitude that is not obtained lightly, and is not a skill that many people have.

After over 20 years, there are countless screams of parents finding their children not breathing that will never leave my brain and multiple days of crying on the way home because the day brought a lot of heart ache and emotions. There are also great moments of joy when we hear the healthy cry of a newborn child that you helped deliver and the

successful dispatch and save of a house fire that the 911 Dispatcher was able to get the correct address from a screaming person and dispatched within seconds.

My personal experiences include children trapped in a burning building in Eagle River, 11 year old found hanging in the garage by his mother, 14 year old with self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, screams of the woman who found her husband who committed suicide after a yoga class, a caller who makes his way through a vehicle pileup on the Seward Highway to perform CPR on a child, the list goes on and on.

911 Dispatchers are trained to conduct 4-5 conversations at once...while on the phone with the caller, hearing for any questions or additional information the responding units may need, listen to the radio to answer and communicate with the crews, answer and direct information to fellow dispatchers who may be on the phone with another caller at the same emergency.

Police Officers, Firefighters, and Paramedics are required to handle calls that are tragic and heartbreaking. Dispatchers are required to handle these calls as well. It is also proven that due to these types of calls that 20-year retirement is necessary and deserved while 911 Dispatchers are given retirement after 30 years. While studies show that the mental stress of 911 Dispatchers is unmatched, revealing mental strain, anxiety, tension, and trauma that will have to be lived with for their entire lives.

While 911 Dispatchers do not run into burning buildings or get physically shot at as a part of their job...we do answer all the calls all shift long. 911 Dispatchers work 12-hour shifts which can easily turn into an 18-hour shift if someone from the on-coming shift calls out sick. Turning many shifts into mandated overtime without planning for it. Statically, 911 Dispatchers do not make to retirement as often as Firefighters and Police Officers and the long term average of depression, anxiety, substance abuse is the same if not more.

911 Dispatching is a calling and a gift. I started in 2005 when I was 26 years old with zero experience. All my training and experience has been provided by the Anchorage Fire Department. I am blessed the Department has invited me back to work for this many years and I'm happy to proud to serve an amazing community. To witness Anchorage Dispatchers in action is a real treat and would impress anyone. Honored to be a part of such a category of people doesn't give it justice.

Classification of 911 Dispatchers to First Responders is not only deserved but well overdo.

Thank you and best regards,

Andrea "Drea" Harding

911 Dispatcher from 2005 to present