

I am retired from 50 years of service in public safety which included serving as a police chief, fire chief and 9-1-1 Dispatch Center Director. I strongly encourage you to approve classifying 9-1-1 Dispatchers as first responders as other states have done. Dispatchers are, in most cases, the first point of contact the public has with public safety. Dispatchers do not just receive information and then relay that to appropriate responder agencies. More often than most people realize Dispatchers are able to resolve the issue just as a responder to the scene might do. Examples of which I am aware from having observed Oregon Dispatchers in action: A Dispatcher talks a citizen through the steps necessary to deliver a baby; A Dispatcher talks someone through CPR prior to the arrival of EMS and as a result the victim lives; . A dispatcher talks a despondent person out of committing suicide just as a law enforcement officer might do upon arrival at the scene, except that important, life saving action has already been done by the Dispatcher. . A Dispatcher talks an armed hostage taker into releasing his hostage(s), putting down his weapon, and peacefully exiting the location to meet with law enforcement personnel...something which would have been more difficult for an on scene responder to accomplish.

Dispatchers as first responders also frequently handle matters over the phone to a full resolution. Matters which without the professional, informed Dispatcher would have required the actual dispatch of a responder to the scene. This saves time, money and keeps the responder free for other purposes. All of the examples I have provided are factual. I have, during my career, observed Dispatchers accomplish each of those many times. Another thing to consider is the working conditions of Dispatchers. When not actively involved in an incident firefighters, EMS responders and law enforcement personnel can "take a break". When not responding to calls for service they can, if they choose, relax. Not true for Dispatchers. They are in a sense married to the dispatch console never knowing when the next call for service will come. "Kicking back" and relaxing is a luxury that Dispatchers can seldom if ever afford.

Your passage of this proposed legislation will formally recognize on behalf of the State of Oregon what the vast majority of us "first responders" have known for some time--that Dispatchers are a vital part of our team and are as much a first responder as any of us who have worked in the field. Thank you for considering this input.