

To: Oregon State Legislature
Senate Committee on Labor and Business

From: Colleen M Aldrich

Re: SB 425 & 426

Greetings Honorable Members,

This written testimony is in support of the Senate Bills listed above. I have been employed as a public safety telecommunicator in Oregon since 1995. I have handled many types of calls during my 25 years of dispatching and I can tell you all, without a doubt, being the first person a citizen talks to during an emergency situation qualifies all public safety dispatchers in the State of Oregon to be "first responders."

Although, we may not walk up to the door and knock, we provide lifesaving instructions, whether medical, or safety, via phone to those who call and are in need of an ambulance, firetruck or police officer. We are the "eyes" and "ears" that obtain vital information that is relayed to field units to assist them in providing whatever service is needed when they arrive at the scene of a call for service.

Furthermore, we are one of the few groups that must always be on duty. We must always answer the phone. Holidays, weekends, regardless if anyone else is on or out in the field. The public safety telecommunicator MUST always be on duty!

As the person on the other side of the emergency, we hear things that no one else wants to hear.

- We hear panicked mothers and fathers whose newborn have stopped breathing.
- We hear the crying spouse who woke up to their lifelong love who passed in the night next to them.
- We hear the person trapped in the vehicle that has been t-boned and has rolled but was able to connect to 911 and/or State Police.
- We talk with the teenager who is considering suicide because they feel ugly.
- We talk with the people hiding at the college or university where an active shooter is present.
- We hear the battered wife being beaten when the child dials 911 to say daddy is hitting mommy.
- We stay on the phone with the teenager who is babysitting and hears a window break and then hears someone moving around in the house while she is trying to get the kids she is watching to a safe location to hide.
- We talk to the distraught parent who finds their 17-year-old child overdosed.

I could go on but, I think you all get the picture. We do not just answer the phone and enter information into a computer and relay that information to the field units. We are there with the victims. **We are first responders.**

Currently telecommunicators are forced to work for no less than thirty (30) years to receive full retirement benefits. We are classified as "general service" employees. If someone started their career at the age of 35, this would make them have to work until there are 65. This may not be an issue for most classified as a "general service" employee. However, I can attest from person experience, that working in this job for 30 years is very difficult. Like other first responders, we suffer from depression, PTSD, fatigue, and other physical ailments related to high levels of stress, and adrenaline surges.

As mentioned above, I started my career in Oregon in 1995. I currently work for the Oregon State Police and have been here for over 15 years. Prior to this I worked at the Klamath County 911 center for approximately 9.5 years. I am 57 years old. I do not want to have to wait until I am 65 to retire and get full PERS benefits. I should be able to retire at 25 years with full retirement benefits like my colleagues in law enforcement and fire service.

In closing, classifying public safety telecommunicators as "first responders" and including them in the definition of "police officer" is the right thing to do for all of us who have dedicated our lives to being that voice on the other end of the line to all those who need help from a police officer, fireman, or paramedic.