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Our Vision: "Embrace a vibrant and growing organization characterized by member support, professional development and stakeholder education."

*OREGON COMBINED CHAPTERS OF:
The Association of Public Safety Communications Officials
(APCO)
& National Emergency Number Association (NENA)
PO BOX 2024
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February 8, 2021

Senator James Manning Jr.
Sponsor of Senate Bill 425, Senate Bill 426, and Senate Bill 427
900 Court St., NE
Salem, OR, 97301

RE: Support for SB 425, SB 426, and SB 427

As the President of the Oregon chapter of the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials and National Emergency Number Association (APCO/NENA), I am writing to express our support for SB 425, SB 426 and SB 427.

Oregon APCO/NENA represents the 9-1-1 centers and Telecommunicators in Oregon. Telecommunicators are often referred to as the "first, first responders." When someone calls 9-1-1 during an emergency, the 9-1-1 Telecommunicator is always the first emergency responder on scene. They gather critical information necessary to send an appropriate response. They provide lifesaving direction to the caller before other responders arrive. They provide critical safety information to the people on scene and to the people responding to the emergency. They deal with extreme stress of trying to save lives over the phone without being able to see what is going on, using only their voice, their instincts and their training.

Imagine answering a phone to hear a female screaming, "My baby is not breathing!" The Telecommunicator has to calm the caller down and get her to follow instructions to save her baby's life. It takes a highly skilled professional to save that child's life. Or imagine a child calling and whispering in the phone, "My mom and dad are fighting and my dad has a gun." The Telecommunicator is now responsible for the lives of the caller, the mom, the dad and the Officers responding to the call. In this case, the Telecommunicator tells the child to give dad the phone, then take mom to the neighbor's house and call back. Meanwhile the Telecommunicator talks with the dad, determines where in the house he is, what kind of weapon he has and what he is thinking about. The Telecommunicator talks the dad into putting the gun down and walking outside to meet the Officers, ensuring he has nothing in his hands. The Telecommunicator just prevented an Officer involved shooting and saved numerous lives.

“They” say Telecommunicators do not experience the same stress as responders in the field. “They” are correct, we are not physically there, we do not see it the way they do, but we experience it nonetheless. We experience the emotions of the callers. We grieve when someone dies, because we now have a connection to the family. And when those four words come screaming over the radio. “SHOTS FIRED, OFFICER DOWN!” we too experience the trauma of that event. In addition, we experience the anxiety and stress of knowing that it is our friend out there. They may have family, maybe children at home. We have to rely on our instincts and training to save that officers’ life. Equally, we are responsible for keeping other responders and bystanders safe. We experience the trauma in real time, all while not being there and not being able to see what is transpiring. At the same time, the 9-1-1 lines are ringing with the next emergency.

These Bills help give Telecommunicators the recognition they deserve for the amazing work they do every day. These Bills recognize the Telecommunicator as the professionals that they are, and that they truly are Oregon’s “first” first responder.

Respectfully,

Scott Haberkorn

Scott Haberkorn, President
Oregon Chapter APCO/NENA