

My name is Christina Carleton and I have been employed in Public Safety for the past 15 years. I started my career dispatching for the Visalia Police & Fire Departments in California for 10 years. I then moved to Oregon and have been working as a Telecommunicator for the past 5 years with Oregon State Police. I am writing today in support of SB425 & SB426.

First and foremost, it must be understood that I unequivocally love my job. I do feel that this job is a calling and not everyone is equipped to deal with the stressors of this job day in and day out. We consider ourselves a special breed. We give of ourselves on a daily basis, most of the time at a great personal sacrifice to our own lives. We miss birthdays, weddings, holidays and even our children's school events. The emotional toll this job can take on us can lead to obesity, alcoholism, depression, PTSD, failed marriages and a myriad of health problems.

We routinely work with equipment that doesn't work properly, Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems that are slow and/or antiquated, burnout, high turnover rates and short staffing numbers. We are subject to mandatory overtime and minimum staffing levels. One of my Troopers can call out sick and the Sgt doesn't scramble to try and find coverage. But when a dispatcher calls out sick, either someone covers the shift or we leave our partners working short staffed.

Most people could not fathom the things that we hear on the phones and the radios on a daily basis. I have been working the radio when two of my officers were shot. I have heard a mother's screams because her baby was shot in the head. I have heard an elderly man begging his wife to come back to him and just wake up. I have heard the sobs of a child as they watch their mother being beaten by their father. I have listened as two people took their last breaths on the phone as I hopefully comfort them by telling them that I'm not going anywhere. I have begged and pleaded with rape victims to not shower even though I know they want to wash the thought of it all away. I have talked people down from killing themselves. I have been the last person people have talked to before they kill themselves, just so we would know where to find their body. I have taken countless calls of people being shot or stabbed.

As dispatchers we understand that we are the voice to the public. The first contact that can make or break the impression of our department. When our department has had a critical incident or a high profile incident, we are the ones taking those calls; oftentimes being called the most vile and disgusting names you could ever imagine. No one ever tells you that you will cry on your way home. No one ever tells you that you will sit in your driveway for an extra 5 minutes to ensure that your children will see you smiling through the pain. No one tells you that you come home from work and don't want to answer your phone or have to make one more decision for the night. No one tells you that even though you can listen to your caller, your partners, your supervisor and your radios all at the same time, you find it impossible some days to focus on what your children are telling you. No one tells you that this job will break your heart more times

than you ever thought possible. But most importantly, no one ever told me how privileged I would feel to get up the next morning and do it all over again. Because I am a dispatcher and what I do makes a difference every single day.

Between the pandemic, anger from citizens over businesses being closed and livelihoods lost, the fires that raged statewide and the riots that consumed Portland and our Capitol, 2020 was one of the hardest years of dispatching I have ever dealt with. I am grateful that I did this job with my family by my side. Because the men and women I work with are my family. We celebrate birthdays and holidays at our consoles, having potlucks so we can try and not feel left out of the celebrations taking place at home. We long for the days when the phones are silent, because for us, that's a good day. We support each other and care for one another and forge bonds that can be stronger than any others we will ever have. We operate under the strong belief that in this family no one fights alone, no one is left behind and everyone goes home.

When I was 19, I was a secretary for a Political Action Committee. If you would have told me back then that a Dispatcher was classified as "clerical" exactly the same as me, I would have laughed at you. What we do, day in and day out, is so much more important than doing clerical work. We make life and death decisions every day. SB425 & SB426 would take appropriate action that is long overdue to reclassify Dispatchers/Telecommunicators as First Responders and be compensated and allowed retirement as such. It is never too late to correct an oversight. Please stand with my brothers and sisters behind the mic and hear our voices. Let us know that we are not the "second class citizens" we have been made to feel that we are. For that day may come when your world is crashing down and are dialing the phone waiting for that calm voice to say "9-1-1 state the location of your emergency".