

Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 2701

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My name is Abigail Chambers and I am writing today to testify my support of HB 2701.

I was released solo on March 1 2023, and hired on as a Telecommunicator on October 3 2022. My tenure as a telecommunicator is not as extensive as some others that may be writing their testimony to you, but I believe that brings a fresh perspective to the table.

A telecommunicator is the vital key and connection between the public's emergencies, and getting the "boots-on-the-ground" to the public's emergencies. These calls for help can range from a basic driving complaint to a major traumatic car accident on the other side of the phone.

A telecommunicator will often stay on the phone line with the public in their crisis and attempt to be the quiet calm for the person on the other line, sending reassurance, providing comfort and instruction to the public while a unit is en route to assist. The public's emergencies vary in severity, but things as routine as a traffic stop have the potential to be anything but routine.

This is an extraordinary feat on its own, but a telecommunicator is expected to do this all while balancing multiple units on multiple events, sending other units to the current emergency, continuing to listen and responding to the phone call and radio traffic at the same time, all while providing excellent service to persons the telecommunicator is serving. To put it simply, a telecommunicator is an excellent multitasker, toggling endlessly between different events, calls, and assisting different people and units.

As a newer telecommunicator, I can attest that this is no easy task. It is a trained skill that is learned only through repetition, exposure to complex events, and exposure to difficult calls.

While a telecommunicator may not be serving the scene in person, they are expected to serve the scene from afar, staying calm while being a direct resource to the units on scene and the public experiencing the emergency. The units communicate details from the scene directly to the telecommunicator for documentation purposes and to have details to provide when asking for further backup or assistance.

This in tandem with the information given from the public exposes telecommunicators to trauma from these scenes, as a telecommunicator's "mind's eye" is expected to foresee any potential risk for the sake of officer safety and public safety, and remedy said risk in many ways. A telecommunicator is required to stay sharp at all times during their shift to be able to assist in the unexpected, get prepared for the worst, and hope for the best.

The things a telecommunicator experiences biologically and scientifically all while being physically at a desk is traumatizing. Yet, if you were to ask the majority of telecommunicators in the industry why they do it, they'll most likely respond with, "I like to help people," and this passion to help carries the telecommunicator through each call and event.

The telecommunicator is the first to know about an emergency, the first to send help, and the last one to know if everything is okay, and about the outcome of the situation. The compassion fatigue, constant stress, constantly thinking about the “what if’s,” and constantly being in this state for ten to twelve hours on a workday is difficult. It is mentally taxing, can be energy-depleting, and is very much non-stop.

To put this into perspective, when a fire or police unit is clear from a scene or a call, they are able to take a moment of down-time in between events. This turn-around time allows the first responder to re-center and prepare for the next call-out or event. However, a telecommunicator is almost always working on high-priority events for a whole shift due to the amount of units they are caring for, phone calls into the dispatch center, and assisting our teammates when an event gets intricately complex.

I am humbly asking that you consider supporting House Bill 2701, and modifying your telecommunicators’ retirement plans. While I am still new to telecom, I’d be happy to invite you to sit with me for a shift and see first hand what I’ve described today. I thank you for your time and appreciate your willingness to hear me out.