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Attention: The Honorable Chair Grayber, Vice-chairs Lewis and Tran, and members of the Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans,

Re: Written testimony in support of Measure HB2701

My name is Teresa Raihala-Sethe and my career in 9-1-1 began on June 21, 1996. In the span of my career I have worked at Astoria, OR 9-1-1; Santa Cruz, CA 9-1-1; and this last January I observed my 20 year anniversary working for Clackamas County, OR 9-1-1. During this time I have experienced many traumas, people in their worst pain and experiences, sleepless nights, restless thoughts, tears cried, deaths, and many more emotions than I can adequately describe in one letter. It is for these and many more reasons I am writing in support of House Bill 2701.

Some of the calls I have dealt with include hearing a man shoot himself over the phone; trying to talk a hysterical mother and father through CPR to revive their 7 year old daughter (she did not survive); delivering babies; police officers screaming for code 3 cover because they're being shot at; hearing firefighters yell, "MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY!" because they were trapped in a burning house with the roof collapsing on them; murder on a boat where the suspect let the boat drift away from a dock while he started it on fire to burn himself, the victim, and the crime scene; a 13 year old child in a suicide pouring gasoline on himself and running down a street aflame, etc. This is just the TIP of the iceberg of what I have experienced in my years. Many of these calls and calls just like them have left me crying, and those I didn't cry for was because there was no time, there was always another 9-1-1 call coming in for someone else who needed help. I have had to internalize...because there was always another person who needed their 9-1-1 call answered.

EVERY 9-1-1 call needs to be answered. During winter storms, during ice storms, during wind storms, during conflagration where the county you work needs evacuated, during Covid...EVERY 9-1-1 call HAS to be answered. We cannot work from home or get time off due to inclement weather, we have to be at our post. This has made it necessary for me to set up a bedroom in an office at our Communications Center. This last winter I had to be away from my family for 3 nights and live in our Quality Assurance Officer's office so I could be sure to make it to work. I have to make this choice every winter.

Adding to this daily trauma is the extreme multi-tasking of several calls at the same time, working several radios at once, making split-second decisions, immediately having to move on to the next call, and monitoring 7 or more computer screens. However, the simple fact that we rarely get to hear the final outcome takes a great toll too. We leave our 12-hour shift never hearing the last chapter. Did they survive? Are they ok? Did all my stress and thousands of hours of training help save a fellow human being?

When we begin to look at the physical and emotional price we pay to be in this career, it is undebatable what long shifts being tied down to a 9-1-1 console will do. Not only have I had to get surgeries in order to mitigate my pain to sit in a chair, I have had to seek mental health counseling to help work through some of the traumas I have had to experience.

I was 26 years of age when I started this profession. I was young, energetic, quick on my toes when it came to thinking, processing, typing, learning new technologies, and easily adapted to changes. Sadly, I have had to come to the realization over the last 8-10 years, as younger generations are starting out in this profession, that I am not at all what I once was. New technologies, times, people are changing and moving at a pace much faster than I adapt to anymore. It is disheartening to have to admit getting older and my mind moving slower in my everyday life but when it comes to having to handle other peoples' lives and emergency situations, it is utterly scary sometimes. I do NOT want my diminishing skills to ever cause danger to others and/or suffer a trauma I would never recover from.

Though I am nearing my retirement mark of 30 years, it is important to me that future generations be respected and appreciated for their very important roles in the chain of survival and emergency services. 9-1-1 telecommunicators are the ones who take care of the police and firefighters that are held in such high regard and should be treated as an equal to them. They are the first person instrumental in how peoples' emergencies turn out and that each responder makes it home safely to their own families. 9-1-1 telecommunicators should be given the opportunity to retire with pride and dignity of a healthy career. I respectfully ask for you to support HB 2701 to have a separate PERS fund and allow for a full retirement for 9-1-1 telecommunicators.

I thank you for taking the time to read and understand a glimpse into my life in this profession and appreciate your public service to the State of Oregon.

Sincerely,

Teresa Raihala-Sethe