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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 Victoria Scholes and I have worked as a 911 Telecommunicator/Dispatcher in Clackamas County since August 28th 2017. In these five and a half years at this job I have answered call after call, every day from citizens experiencing their worst day. I may not see their crisis in person, but as a 911 Telecommunicator I am the first person to hear them and the first to help them. Answering multiple calls day after day starts to take a toll. It is for this reason I am writing in support of HB2701.

There are two questions that are typically asked when someone finds out I am a 911 Telecommunicator. One of them I never have an answer for: "What is your funniest/strangest call?" When asked this question my brain blue screens like an old Windows computer. I know an answer exists. We get some strange calls, some calls that make us laugh, and on the rare occasion we get to share a laugh with the citizen calling in. I can never remember these calls, and yet this is this question I prefer. I have answers to the other question, "What was your worst call?" In most instances, that is the question I chose not to answer because it triggers all sorts of memories.

I remember the pained screams of a woman as she waits for medics to arrive after her vehicle rolled over her, and I can hear the silence when she stops.

I remember the overwhelmed voice of a kid as I provide him and his mom CPR instructions for his dad.

I remember the tears in the voice of a man as he tells me his girlfriend is having a miscarriage, and her sobs as she grieves her loss.

I remember the fear in a young boy's voice as he hides in his room because his parents are fighting.

I remember the gasping agonal breaths of a young man as I walk his mother through how to do chest compressions.

I remember the scared voices of a couple barricaded in their house as their neighbor in a mental health crisis walks around it with a gun occasionally firing off shots. I remember the calm voice of my coworker as she talks to that neighbor on the phone and tries to get him to set the gun down.

I remember, in the early stages of the pandemic, the shock in a man's voice as he realizes his mom is experiencing Covid-like symptoms and the desperation as he asks me if she is going to die.

I remember the stressed voice of my coworker when she calls to advise me that we are having to evacuate our center because the wildfires are getting too close.

I remember the panic in a new mother's voice as she tells me her baby is turning blue.

I remember the heart wrenching sobs of a mom as she tells me her young son just shot himself and the heart break when she tells me he is beyond help.

These calls I remember like it was yesterday, but don't usually share because the fear of placing that weight on someone else. These are just handful of the calls I remember; just a sample of the trauma that sticks, and that's just the beginning. There is always another call to be answered

The stress and trauma involved in police, fire, and EMS jobs has been widely researched and documented, but the research into the stress involved in 911 Telecommunications jobs is relatively new. For many years 911 Telecommunicators have been seen as nothing more than clerical workers. We answer calls and respond accordingly, but it is the nature of the calls that separates 911 Telecommunicators from other call centers. Not to mention, some aspects of the job that have far more similarities to other first responders. We work the same strange hours, often pulling overtime hours or full shifts to help out with gaps in the schedule. There are no holidays or inclement weather days where we don't have to go into work. I have missed many family events and have even spent nights sleeping on a cot in an office when the roads were too hazardous to drive. We come to work every day to a high stress job that will, more likely than not, at some point affect our health (PTSD, blood pressure, and insomnia to name a few).

Even though our interactions occur over a headset, we can't always just brush the day off and go home; there are some things we carry with us. It is with all of this in mind that I respectfully ask for your support on HB2701. Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony and for your consideration on this important topic.

Sincerely,

Victoria Scholes