



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

To: House Committee On Emergency Management, General Government, and Veterans
From: Oregon Chapter APCO/NENA
Date: March 30, 2023
RE: HB 2701 High Risk, High Stress

Dear Chair Grayber, Vice Chair Lewis, Vice Chair Tran, and members of the committee

The state chapter of APCO/NENA supports HB2701 for all public safety telecommunicators. This bill moves in the right direction and recognizes the long-term health and mental affects the job creates. Telecommunicator's job may be different than police officers and firefighters, but they truly are a first responder and deserve the recognition for it.

Telecommunicators are an essential part of emergency services. They are the First Responder able to provide assistance and instructions to people in need. Telecommunicators can take numerous calls during their careers that create stress and trauma. They may take a phone call from a parent who just found their child not conscious or breathing, multiple calls on a bad accident, or a call from someone who found a friend who had shot themselves. A telecommunicator will help each caller through that situation until police or fire arrive and then hang up the line and move onto the next emergency. There is no time to process the emotions from one call before moving onto the next. There are countless stories and statistics showing the effect of vicarious trauma and the wellbeing of telecommunicators.

Most in the profession are not able to work until they are eligible for full retirement because of the ongoing stress and fatigue of the job. They not only deal with the biggest tragedies in their community but also are tasked with keeping our police, fire, and EMS responders safe. When there are snowstorms, fires, or other incidents that most of the community would stay home or be with their family during, telecommunicators go to work and many times work overtime to help keep the lifeline to help going. There is a staffing shortage in almost all centers in Oregon, which means employees are working longer hours. The vigilance of being there for the community and responders every day at all hours, takes its toll and burns out telecommunicators before retirement.

Telecommunicators are truly First Responders and should receive the same retirement benefits as other first responders. Our state, along with many others, have taken the first step in recognizing that first responder status for telecommunicators. The next step is to add to the legitimacy of being a first responder and pass HB2701.

Thank you for your consideration.