“911, what is your emergency?”

This phrase in it’s varying agency iterations is repeated thousands of times throughout the State of Minnesota by hundreds of public safety dispatch professionals every day. The responses on the other end of that emergency call are guaranteed to be anything from “Sorry, I bumped my phone, it was an accident”, to the unforgettable, gut wrenching screams from a parent that has just found their child deceased. The words spoken by the people we are tasked to do everything we can to help can be routine, or they can be life changing.

I have been involved with 911 for just over 18 years, and I can attest that 911 is very much a give and take profession. It gives to you an immense responsibility, a high respect for yourself, your coworkers, and it gives a sense of service to the community. What it takes from you is thought to be understood when you begin, however the full reality of it takes some time to set in. The job takes away family time, it takes holidays, it takes birthdays, it takes funerals, and family gatherings. It takes rest, and at times it takes away the ability to relax, decompress, and recharge. It is, as are all 24-7 public safety positions, the unfortunate realities of the job.

Over the course of my career I have heard countless odd conversations, 911 accidental dials, concerns of barking dogs, vandalized mail boxes, and neighbors having a bit of a hard time getting along. Also in that career I have heard countless cries for help from people on the verge of taking their own life, terrified voices pleading for help as I do everything I can to walk them through CPR on their lifeless loved one, and people screaming in pain, and afraid for their live as they are punched and kicked in violent domestics. These voices don’t fade as quickly from memory. It has been nearly 16 years but I can still clearly remember a little boy I took a 911 call from where his first words were “my daddy is hitting my mommy” as a very obvious violent domestic was occurring in the background.

Some are harder than others. Kallie Palmer was 6, she died after her “friends” convinced her to run into traffic on 35W after scaling a small chain link fence along the freeway. While working on our fire channel I sent one of our fire departments to a call none of us will ever forget. Some of these don’t go away. It is these and countless other hundreds of stories of calls and radio traffic that 911 operators carry with them through their careers.

Standing back and examining the job we can look at the calls each dispatcher took in a month, the times that they worked “on the radio” with officers and firefighters, and the number of medicals and fire calls that a person processed in a month. One can examine the numbers, and statistics however the brutal reality of the things we as 911 professionals hear throughout a career are infinitely difficult to quantify on paper. The world of 911 and public safety is also a vast producer of statistics. By nature of the job, 911 operators, officers, and other various agency staff produces mountains of data that goes mostly unnoticed by the general public. Statistics assist in demonstrating the need for changes in staffing, equipment requirements, changes

in policy, needed technology improvements, and many other identifiable topics that one might generate a statistic for.

Law Enforcement Deaths are one of the very sad industry statistics that are tabulated annually. From 2009 to 2019, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (https://nleomf.org/ ) data there was an average of 161 officers that died in the line of duty. On Wednesday, July 30th 2014 the 911 center that I, and a number of my very skilled partners work at, became a part of one of those terrible statistics. That day my partners were slapped square in the face by frantic phone calls and radio traffic that told us one of our officers had just been shot. The seconds, minutes, and hours that followed were an enormous team effort on both sides of the radio to find the person responsible for the death of one of our officers. That experience will never leave any of us that were working that day. It was, and still is to this day profoundly painful, and impactful for everyone involved. This, and other critical incident, high stress calls are the toll that the 911 profession eventually takes on all of us in some way.

In conjunction with my 911 career, I also served as a volunteer firefighter for over 16 years. I can attest to the mental and physical nature of the job, the stress on the body, and the time away from home. 911 is equally as taxing however it is taxing on the mind infinitely more than the body. The constant high vigilance and attention to detail required is mentally exhausting. The need to regularly monitor multiple officers & firefighters, on multiple radio channels as well as manage call load displayed on multiple computer screens quite honestly puts the basic definition of "multitasking" to utter shame.

The 911 professional has evolved into a high stress, highly involved, and highly technical industry. Staffing issues are still issues from a logistical standpoint; however what they do is compound the call load, and stress load for everyone involved. That being said, the raw impact on each 911 operator is still there, with each and every call or radio transmission that is taken. We are truly the "first", first responders. It is our belief that this profession has infinitely expanded in both scope and demand, far beyond where we are identified in regards to the current positioning within the PERA benefits program.

We as an industry appreciate the time you are taking to investigate this needed shift in retirement and increased 911 Telecommunicator benefits. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Signature redacted

National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund - https://nleomf.org/memorial/facts-figures/officer-fatality-data/officer-deaths-by-year/