



Central Office

1450 Energy Park Drive, Suite 200, St. Paul, MN 55108
Main: 651.361.7200 | Fax: 651.642.0223 | TTY: 800.627.3529
www.mn.gov/DOC

October 7, 2021

Susan Lenczewski
Executive Director
Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
Room 55, State Office Building
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Ms. Lenczewski,

The Department of Corrections (DOC) appreciates the importance of benefits, including retirement and pension options, as a way of rewarding the critical work and services our incredible state employees provide to Minnesotans. There is no question that 911 telecommunicators are an invaluable part of the State of Minnesota's emergency response efforts.

The DOC acknowledges that the 2021 omnibus pension and retirement bill established a working group to study whether 911 telecommunicators should receive enhanced pension benefits. It is our understanding that, currently, most 911 telecommunicators in Minnesota are covered by the PERA or MSRS general plans. The law requires the working group to "recommend whether changes to the pension plan coverage for 911 telecommunicators are appropriate. If the working group finds that such changes are appropriate, the working group must recommend changes to the pension plan coverage for 911 telecommunicators. ***The recommended changes may include but are not limited to moving 911 telecommunicators to the correctional plans.***"

This letter serves as the DOC position statement regarding whether to transfer 911 telecommunicators employed by the State of Minnesota from the General Plans to the MSRS Correctional Plan. The DOC is also available for conversation and very willing to respond to any questions that the working group may have.

DOC acknowledges that 911 telecommunicators play an integral role in our public safety system. They are often the first interaction community members and victims have with the system. 911 telecommunicators often hear harrowing incidents play out in real time which impacts their well-being and causes vicarious trauma. First responders rely on them to ensure they have the relevant information to keep themselves and those involved in a situation safe. In short, the work that 911 telecommunicators do is difficult and provides tremendous value to the rest of the criminal justice system.

Minn. Stat. § 352.91 establishes the state correctional plan, sets the eligibility criteria, and includes specific staff from DOC and Department of Human Services (DHS), in particular, corrections officers, supervisors, lieutenants, captains, canine officers, special teachers, nursing personnel, security counselors, or positions with at least 75% of work time spent in direct contact with incarcerated individuals or patients who work at a state correctional facility, the state-operated forensic services program, or the Minnesota Sex Offender Program.

The DOC expects that the working group will likely review the differences between the General Plans and the Correctional Plan being considered, including how and when vesting occurs, employee contribution rates, normal retirement age, etc. It is critically important to understand WHY those differences exist. Expanding the state correctional plan to include 911 telecommunicators would impact both DOC and DHS.

The eligibility and criteria specific to the Correctional Plan are due to the very unique nature of work inside secure facilities. These particular DOC and DHS personnel work in environments like none other in the state. The DOC exists to transform lives to create a safer Minnesota. Secure and carceral settings, particularly those where longer-term confinement and programming or treatment are the focus, offer a very exclusive kind of employment opportunity for the individuals who work there. Health and safety is paramount and concerns around both have a particularly acute impact on DOC and DHS employees. As such, the pension benefits presented in the Correctional Plan take this impact into account by incorporating a higher pension valuation formula, requiring longer terms of service to vest, allowing higher employee contribution rates, establishing a significantly lower retirement age (by 10 years) than a typical state employee, and including a higher annual cost of living increase for retirees.

Taking all of these differences into consideration, DOC is concerned about expanding the pool of eligible employees with very diverging job responsibilities. DOC recommends that the benefits for our 911 telecommunicators colleagues be appropriately reviewed and expanded but cautions against making changes to the criteria for inclusion laid out in MS 352.91.

DOC stands very willing to engage with the working group around this issue and recognizes that this position may make the working group work more challenging. If you have additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me or Government Relations Director Safia Khan, safia.khan@state.mn.us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Schnell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Paul Schnell

Commissioner of Corrections

cc: Safia Khan, Government and External Relations Director
Amber Jones, Policy Advisor, Governor Walz