

November 8, 2021

(via email: chad.burkitt@lcpr.leg.mn)

Chad Burkitt
Legislative Commission on Pensions & Retirement
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Blvd.
Room 55, State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

RE: 911 Telecommunicators Pension Benefits

Dear Mr. Burkitt,

The Minnesota Correctional Officer Retirement Association (MNCORA) strongly opposes the inclusion of 911 Operators, Dispatchers, and Telecommunicators in the PERA Correctional Plan. The Plan was established separate from all other job classifications because the job is unique among public employees. The inclusion of Dispatchers may deserve a better pension plan than they now have, but they do not belong in the Correctional Plan.

Dispatchers don't fit the definition.

Dispatchers do not fit the definition of those permitted into the Correctional Plan. The Plan was established in 1999 for correctional officers serving in county and regional adult and juvenile correctional facilities due to the physical nature of their jobs. **The members of this plan are responsible for the security, custody and control of the facilities and their inmates.** Dispatchers who work solely in a dispatch role, and not a combined role of Jailer-Dispatcher, do not meet the job requirements to be let into the plan. The plan description would have to be changed, but it is important to recognize why it was written to be exclusive for correctional officers.

Correctional work is hazardous. Dispatch work is not.

The Correctional Plan was established because a career working in correctional positions is physically hazardous and those choosing this career need an earlier retirement option than most other job classifications.

It is the recognized policy of the state that special consideration should be given to employees of governmental subdivisions who devote their time and skills to protecting the property and personal safety of others. **Since this work is hazardous, special provisions are hereby made for retirement pensions, disability benefits and survivors benefits based on the particular dangers inherent in these occupations.** The benefits provided

in sections [353.63](#) to [353.68](#) are more costly than similar benefits for other public employees since they are computed on the basis of a shorter working lifetime taking into account experience which has been universally recognized.

Minn. Stat. § 353.63 Providing this earlier retirement option is expensive, so it is reserved for those providing essential government services which are difficult to do at age 65. Correctional Officers have high rates of assault, ranging from punches, bodily fluids thrown on them, shanks, rapes, and even murder. They also have high exposure to communicable disease like tuberculosis and SARS-CoV-2. High numbers of correctional officers became ill from COVID-19, and there have been outbreaks of TB among CO's.

In contrast, 911 Dispatchers are not assaulted or exposed to blood and bodily fluids of inmates. 911 Telecommunicators work in a controlled environment that is not public-facing. They have not been exposed to COVID-19 from inmates. 911 Telecommunicators are not responsible for the security, custody and control of the facilities and their inmates.

Treat Dispatchers and Correctional Officers Equitably.

The current proposal is to permit Dispatchers to transfer their time from other PERA plans into the Correctional Plan. However, when the Correctional Plan was formed, Correctional Officers time in the PERA General Plan did not transfer over with them. They started fresh and it took 3 years to be vested. Now, it takes 10 years to be fully vested in the Correctional Plan.

Allowing 911 Dispatchers to transfer time in would be unfair to Correctional Officers and upset the financial stability of the PERA Correctional Plan. PERA Executive Director Doug Anderson estimated it would cost \$79 million to add 911 Dispatchers to the PERA Correctional Plan. An Actuarial study *must* be done to determine the actual cost before any decisions can be made.

In summary, MNCORA opposes adding 911 Telecommunicators to the PERA Correctional Plan. Dispatchers do not fit the definition authorizing their entry. 911 Telecommunicators work in a safe office at a desk, so they do not have a hazardous duty that complies with Policy in § 353.63. Correctional Officers have inmate contact and are regularly assaulted and exposed to disease in the course of their work. 911 dispatchers are seeking to credit years of service into a plan they have not paid into, a benefit not given to Correctional Officers. Finally, an Actuarial study must be done before any recommendation is made.

Sincerely,

The MNCORA Board

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