

911 Telecommunicator Pension Benefits Working Group

Date: November 9, 2021

To: Members of the 911 Telecommunicator Pension Benefits Working Group

From: Matt Hilgart, Government Relations Manager, Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC)
Matt Massman, Executive Director, Minnesota Inter-County Association (MICA)

Subject: AMC/MICA Survey of Employers

Note: The following are from emails received by Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement (LCPR) staff from Matt Hilgart and Matt Massman on November 9, 2021. An Excel spreadsheet, which was a compilation of the responses from employers to the survey, was attached to the email from Matt Hilgart and provided separately to the working group.

From Matt Hilgart, Association of Minnesota Counties

I'm a little worried about the capacity and time sensitivity of LCPR staff to put together a report given the time of year we are approaching. As such, I'm attaching for the group some raw survey data that AMC/MICA compiled earlier this Fall and was ready to present on today. The data is not as neatly summarized as we'd like it to be, but we took away the following:

- Generally speaking, separation rates for dispatchers are higher than total county employees averages during all five years surveyed. Survey comments point to a mix of turnover drivers, including high turnover during the probation or training phases and in the early years of 911 dispatch employment due to night/weekend hours, or because the employees seek promotion/higher pay in other positions. Mental/emotional stress and difficulties of the job were also noted as a factor.
- There is anecdotal evidence that in the last couple years (particularly 2021), counties are experience significant turnover in other classifications as well—including, but not limited to: jailers/corrections employees, public health nurses, engineers, assessors, and child protection workers. [This information was gathered at a fall HR conference and throughout AMC District Meetings]
- Dispatchers are far less likely than current correctional plan employees to file and receive workers compensation benefits during all five years surveyed.
- County respondents are split on whether hiring 911 dispatchers is more challenging relative to the hiring of other classes of employees.
- Counties have/are working to implement a variety of HR approaches to address turnover and recruitment challenges—including, but not limited to: pay increases/pay studies, shift differentials, increased health benefits/premium pay, scheduling flexibility changes through collective bargaining (3, 12-hour shifts with 3-4 days off was a common trend asked for by unions), training support, and more.
- Some counties also have joint jailer/dispatcher positions which have duties both dispatching and assisting with jail intake/supervision. These positions are already eligible for Corrections Plan.
- Some HR professionals questioned how a pension change would benefit younger employees or younger generations who tend not to stay in this particular position for long. For example, under the current proposal, it would take 10 years to become fully vested. What happens to individuals who leave before then?

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AMC has also approached our membership (elected commissioners) to solicit their own ideas about this proposal. Commissioners agreed that this job has hardships, particularly as they relate to late hours, the stressful nature of calls, and extra time/holiday work requirements. Moreover, Commissioners were quick to recognize that several county employee classes carry significant burdens as a result of their public service, and that these burdens include both mental and physical stresses. While AMC is certainly open to continued discussion regarding opportunities to better support dispatchers through current benefit structures and additional mental health supports, we do not feel that a transfer to the PERA Correctional Plan is appropriate.

From Matt Massman, Minnesota Inter-County Association

MICA agrees with this overall assessment of the survey data.

Consistent with the survey data/responses, discussions with MICA counties underscores that there 9-1-1 telecommunicator roles are mentally/emotionally stressful, and can be challenging to recruit and retain. Counties report using various strategies to address the mental/emotional stress of the positions, greater scheduling flexibility, training, improved technology, pay/financial incentives. There is almost universal skepticism that preferential pension benefits (PERA-Correctional Plan) are supported by the data and workplace conditions for only this group of employees, and relative to other employee classes.

In lieu of a work group meeting today (Agenda Item #3), perhaps the staff/Work Group could identify points of consensus so staff can begin assembling a report document. For example, a large amount of data has been assembled in an effort to understand whether and how 9-1-1 workplace conditions differ from other classes of employees. Additionally, the 2003 report identified a variety of consensus conditions for policymakers to consider if they decided to establish differential pension benefits. That study is old but the concept/structure could still be followed to put forward a refreshed list of consensus conditions that the Legislature should take into account if they expand pension benefits.