

To Whom it May Concern:

I have been a Public Safety Dispatcher (PSD)/Telecommunicator (TC) for the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office for over six years and as a PSD/TC for about 15 years. Over the course of my career, we have seen substantial changes to our job.

The most significant changes have come from the people we serve in the type, complexity, and severity of 911 calls we receive. The number of high priority calls have increased. High priority calls are those that pose a life and death situation to the person calling or a person they are calling for. At any time of day, we could be taking a call for a shooting, assault, robbery, shots fired, carjacking or for medical emergencies ranging from CPR for an infant not breathing to helping render aide for someone who is overdosing or control bleeding for someone who has been shot or stabbed or assaulted.

The frequency of these calls has gone from once or twice a week to multiple times a day. We are constantly bombarded with someone's worst day. We are asked to take hundreds of calls a day of being yelled and screamed at because people are stressed and worried or frightened. We are asked to help those with mental health issues deal with their delusions, or required to talk a person who is suicidal down from jumping off a bridge or shooting themselves. We are asked to talk to children who are crying and frightened because their mom and dad are fighting, and they don't know what to do. We are asked to comfort a parent who has found their child deceased and try to help them to perform CPR or to comfort a wife who found her husband of 30+ years dead. Trying to calm them enough to be able to get the information that is needed so we can send the help that they need.

We are asked to come to work during civil unrest. When we are asked not to wear our work uniforms (blue polo with RCECC emblem and blue pants) because our management is worried about our safety. We come to work every day and our communications center is surrounded by barrier, fences, and barbed wire. Answering calls from people who are angry with police and yell and swear and make threats to your life and safety. To come in on days off to help with the increase of call volume and radio traffic.

Even with all of this going on, we continue to serve the community by reporting to work during a global pandemic, while others worked from the safety of their homes. Rather, we worked multiple 16-hour days in a row to cover those that are sick or whose family is sick.

We are asked to dispatch and keep the officers we serve safe. We are asked to make judgement calls, and if those calls are incorrect, we suffer the consequences. We are asked to take on additional responsibility; additional police departments, State Fair, protests, and community events that require police or Fire/EMS assistance.

We are constantly being asked to do more with less. Less pay, less benefits, less staff, less resources. And we are required to provide the same level of service, with greater amounts of stress being placed upon us.

Over the past 15 years, I have talked to people who are upset about their missing dog or a car parked illegally, or about a neighbor who is blowing their leaves/snow in their yard. On the other end of that I have talked to children who are hiding in their closet or under their bed because dad is hitting mom. I have talked to a father who was being held hostage by his son who was on drugs and having a mental health crisis. I listen to the gut-wrenching sobs of a mother who has found their child blue and lifeless. I

have heard a woman screaming for help because she came home to find her husband hanging in the garage, a tornado touchdown, a group of people who drove their car into the river and didn't know where they were. I have taken calls I don't remember, not because I have a bad memory, but because I can't relive these calls every day. I can't because of my mental health. These stories are, unfortunately, common for all of those who proudly do this work.

During my career, I have had to work during holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, family functions, dinners with friends, and children's school functions. I have come to work in snowstorms, tornado warnings, during the pandemic and during civil unrest.

There are times when I don't work but am too tired to get out of bed. I am too tired to put on a happy face and talk to my loved ones. I am too tired to socialize with friends. I have worked with friends who have had to quit because the stress and weight of what we do was too much for them. I have had coworkers commit suicide because of the stress and mental toll it takes doing this job. I have had coworkers die because of the stress, lack of sleep and sedentariness of this job. Research has pointed to sitting as the new smoking and we work 12–16-hour days sitting in a chair to do this job.

We have few resources for any mental health help. We have few resources for PTSD that comes with this job. We might not be on the streets driving around and seeing the things that our partners see or hear but the impact this job has on each of us is substantial and profound. It changes who we are, it changes the way we see people and how we see the world.

We as PSD/TCs might work in an office but we are also first responders. Our turnover rate is 5 years, which is the point when most people quit. That is when the mental and health aspects is too much. If you think we are administrative assistants or secretaries I ask you to come work a week our lives. Listen to the calls we take, to the amount of radio traffic we listen to, to the medial help we render and tell me at that time we are not first responders.

This profession is hard, but I also know that it can be rewarding. Those that are able to stay in this profession for more than a few years are dedicated to making a difference in the lives of the people that make that 911 call. We are the lifeline to the help they need. Much like a licensed peace officer, or a firefighter, this job takes a hard toll on our bodies and mind, but unlike those other public safety professionals we are not eligible for early retirement or other enhanced PERA benefits. For the sake of the people we serve, and those dedicated to this profession, that should be changed to allow us to be incorporated into the Corrections Pension Plan and afforded the same benefits of our corrections partners.

Thank you for your time,

Signature Redacted - A tired and overworked PSD – Ramsey County Emergency Communication Center