

# Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement

Representative Kaohly Vang Her, Chair

Monday, April 29, 2024 – 8:30 AM  
Capitol Room 120

## SUBMITTED TESTIMONY

- 5. Discussion: Pension options for public safety and public safety adjacent positions in the PERA General Plan such as 911 telecommunicators, probation and parole officers, and county child support agents.**

### **Combined submitted testimony related to 911 telecommunicators and probation and parole officers:**

*In order of date and time received*

Freeborn Co. Sheriff's Correctional Officers and Employees Petition  
Anoka Co. Sheriff's Office Detention Deputies, Correctional Officers and Employees Petition  
Hennepin Co. Sheriff's Office Detention Deputies and Employees Petition  
Olmsted Co. Sheriff's Office Correctional Officers and Employees Petition  
Sherburne Co. Sheriff's Office Correctional Officers and Employees Petition  
St. Louis Co. Sheriff's Office Correctional Officers and Employees Petition  
Steele Co. Sheriff's Office Correctional Officers and Employees Petition  
Washington Co. Sheriff's Office Correctional Officers and Employees Petition  
Wright Co. Sheriff's Office Correctional Officers and Employees Petition  
Minnesota 911 Dispatchers Statewide Testimonials on Pensions and Retirement Age  
St. Louis County 911 Dispatchers  
Anne Felber, Probation Officer, Hennepin County Intimate Partner Violence unit

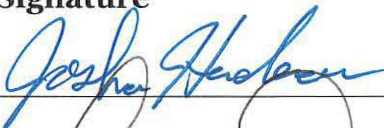

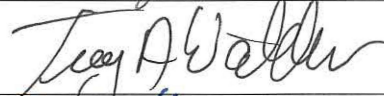



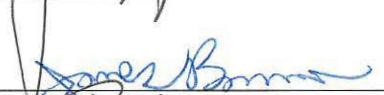


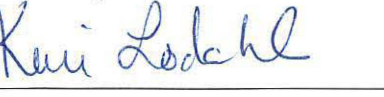




Members of the Pension Committee, We the undersigned are **Correctional Officers** and Employees of the **Freeborn County Sheriff's Office** and are opposed to HF4796 and SF4958, a Bill that would add 911 Dispatchers to the PERA Correctional Plan.

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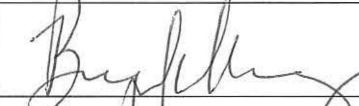
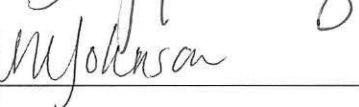
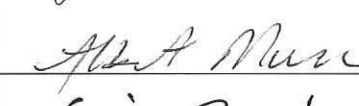
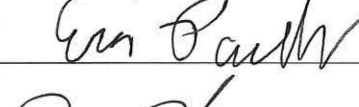
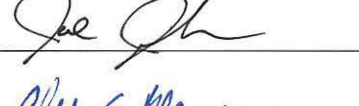

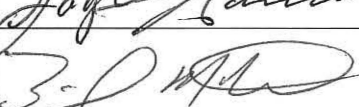

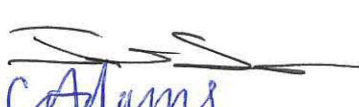


NAME	Signature	Date
Joshua Henderson		3-27-24
Casay Arnold		3-26-24
Troy Waldenar		3-26-24
Stephanie Hester		3-26-24
Ruby Guemen		3-26-24
Jerry Haugh		3-26-24
James Bollinger		3-26-24
Sierra Babcock		3-26-24
Miles Hurley		3-26-24
Kari Lodahl		3-26-24
Isiah Wall		03/27/24
Jay Weatherson		03/29/24

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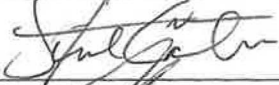




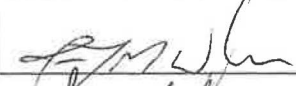

NAME	Signature	Date
Greg Jensen.		3-26-24
Kate Monson		3-26-24
Jacob Blaca		3-26-24
Bryan Krockelberg		3-27-24
Melanie Johnson		3-27-24
Albert Mace		3-27-24
Eric Parker		3-27-24
Joe Johnson		3-27-24
Alex Blaschko		3-27-24
Gage Hanna		3-27-24
Leif Martinson		3-27-24
Derek Nelson		3-27-24
Josic Sailer		3-27-24
Chelsea Adams		3-28-24
Fernando Sanchez		3-29-24

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NAME	Signature	Date
Brent Foss		3-14-24
Cory Brown		3-14-24
Steve Cater		3-14-2024
Matt Weitel		3/14/24
Chad Zabel		3/14/24
Patrick Geertsema		03/14/24
Corbin Sykes		3/14/24
TERRON WENGLER		3-14-24
SARAH WILLIAMS		3-14-24

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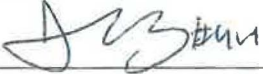


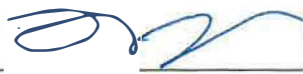
NAME	Signature	Date
Jesse Rasmussen		3/14/24
Bryan Graham		3-14-24
Nicholas Parker		3/14/2024
Eric STAFFORD		03/14/24
Logan McEnelly		3/14/24
Sevak Bialk		3/15/24
Jared Pace		3-15-24
CHRIS THIBAUT		3/15/2024
Kevin Peterson		3-15-24
LIZA RODRIGUEZ		3/15/24

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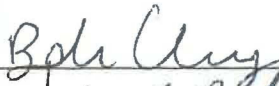

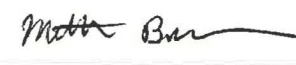

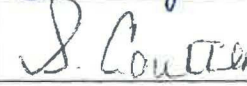
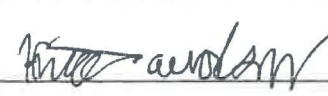
NAME	Signature	Date
Braden Ohmsted		3-15-24
Ethen Purdy		3-15-24
Brendon Colwell	M338	-15-24
Jason Pederson		3-15-24
Jai Vang		3/15/24
Nicole Menne		3/15/24
Dennis 401		3/16/24
Douglas 466		3-16-24
Lund-weeds	WLW 485	3-16-24

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NAME	Signature	Date
Meng Hong		3.16.24
Branden Cheney		3/17/24
Dan Bullock		3/17/24
Matthew Buckley		3/18/24
Sheila Larson		3/18/24
Shannon Coulter		3/18/24
Hunter Anderson		3/18/24



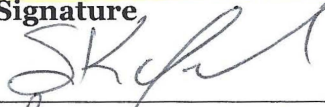
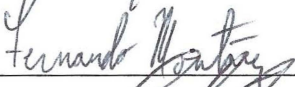






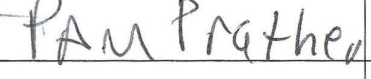

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**MNPEA MEMBERS**

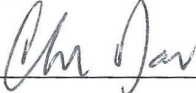





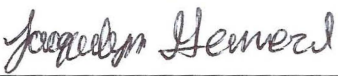


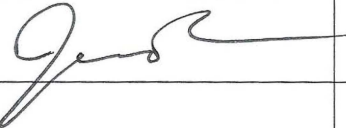
NAME	Signature	Date
Sarah Kolstad		03/14/24
Fernando Montañez		3/14/24
Chris Johnson		3/14/24
Shawn Clarin		3/14/24
Tom Foley		3-14-24
Huechee Lee		3/14/24
Victor Sosa		3/14/24
Ambu Garway		3/14/24
Pam Prather		3/14/24
Blaine Johnson		3/14/24

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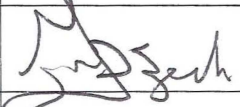


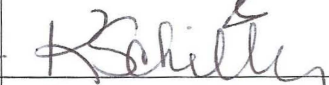


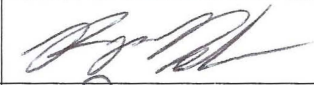
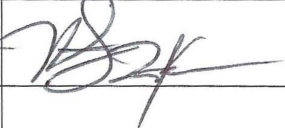
NAME	Signature	Date
Chris Davis		3-15-24
Daisy Kolstad		03/15/2024
KRISTOPHER MONTEKO		03/15/2024
KATHRYN NELSON		3/15/24
Ryan Herack		3-15-24
TIM ROSE		3-15-24
Jacquelyn General		3-15-24
Racquel Dearing		3/15/24
Mitchel Dank		3/15/24
Jeremy Daw		3/15/24

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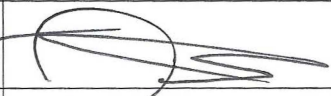

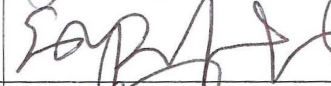

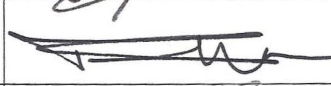




NAME	Signature	Date
Tamarah Clemmens		3/15/24
GREGORY CREEK		3-15-2024
Steen Balar		3/15/24
David Morgan		3-15-24
Katherine Schiller		3-15-24
Justin Mix		3/15/24
Ed Chesmer		3-15-24
RYAN NELSON		3/16/24
Harly Hansen		3-16-24

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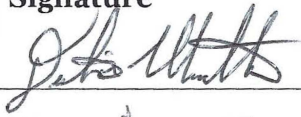
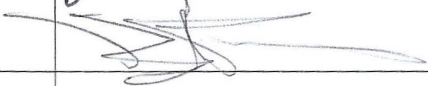


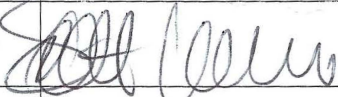





NAME	Signature	Date
Russ Simpson		3/16/2024
Amara Kaarah		3-16-2024
Esperanza Hood		3-16-24
Wayne Charles		3-16-24
TON LEENHIAVUE		3/16/24
CHRIS HUBER		3/16/24
Andrew Walton		3/16/24
CARA LANGE		031624
Noel Schitter		3/16/24

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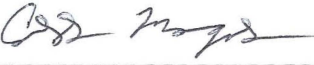

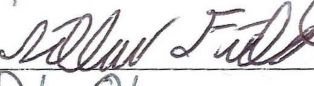
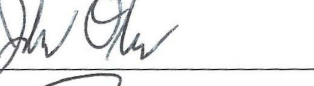

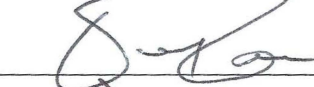

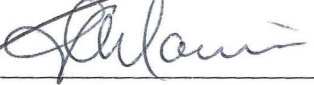
NAME	Signature	Date
Dustin Morette		3-18-24
Throne, Brandon		3-18-24
Zimmerman, Andrew		3-18-24
Maggay Carlson		3/18/24
SCOTT WIDAL		3/18/24
Richard Deal		3/18/24
M. Bertils		3-20-24
Dave General		3-20-24
Dan Christenson		3/20/24
Travis Thorson		3/20/24

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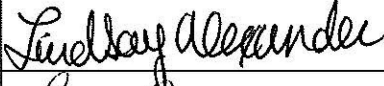

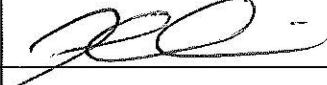



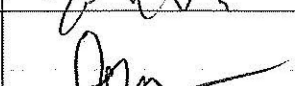

NAME	Signature	Date
Cass Magnuson		3/20/2024
Nancy Trimbo		3/21/2024.
Dillon Field		3/21/2024
John Olson		03/21/2024
Kayse Abdurahman		03/21/2024
Tony Reme		3/21/24
Khaled Mamed		3/21/24
Robin MARION		3/21/24

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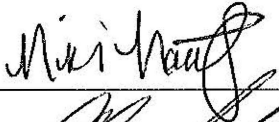


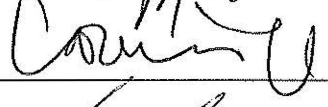


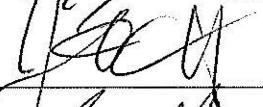


NAME	Signature	Date
Travis Pries		3/17/24
Brandon Richardson		3/17/24
Lindsay Alexander		3/17/24
Lorie Schueler		3/17/24
Justin Dombrowski		3/18/24
D'Angello Williams		3/18/24
Mary Mauseth		3/18/24
John Wade		3-18-24
Ashtey Ryan		3-18-24
Bleete Reuter		3-19-24

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NAME	Signature	Date
Niki Naatz		3-18-24
ALAN STOCKINGER		3-18-24
Chad Mathen		3-18-24
Carina Olvera		3/18/24
LaDorinda Yancey		3/18/24
Aaron Kuehn		3/18/24
Jason Atkeson		3/18/24
Jerome Wanner		3/18/24
DAVID Schilling		3/19/2024

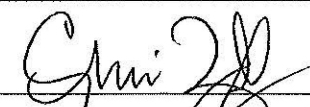
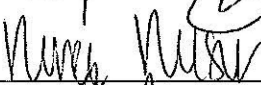


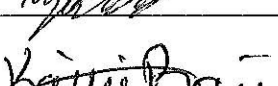
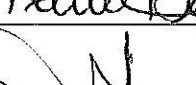

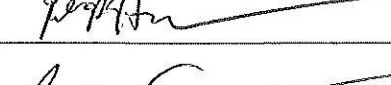
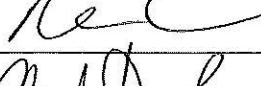


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**We the undersigned are opposed to Bill HF4796 and ask you not to support it.**

NAME	Signature	Date
Sheri Zeller		3/19/2024
Nessa Nelson		3/19/24
Aaron Farr		3/19/24
Kyle Colwell		3/19/24
Kaitlin Bain		3-19-24
Dean Pike		3/19/24
Reed Hansen		3/19/24
Nue Gonzalez		3-19-24
Maja Donohue		3-19-24

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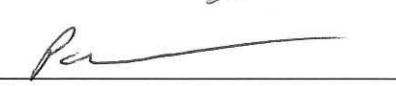
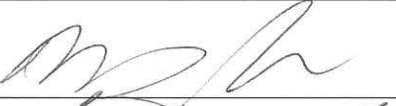
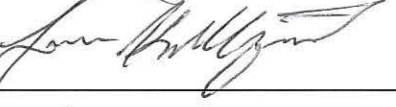

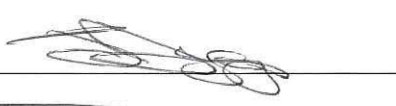

NAME	Signature	Date
Michel Buel		3/15/24
Robert Bauer		3/13/24
Zachary Corrigan		3/13/2024
Gary Miller		3/13/24
Salamong Xcong		3/13/24
Brian McDonough		3-13-24
Rachael Clem		3.13.24
Noah Alebsan		3/13/24
Russ Denny		3/13/24
Steph Whiteis		3-14-24
Cobey Martin		3-15-24

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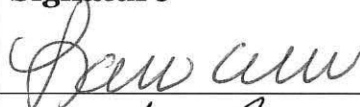
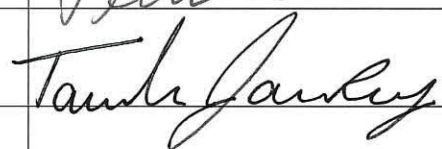




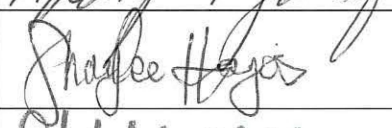

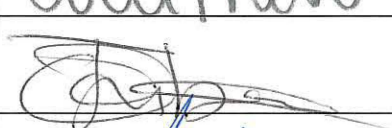


NAME	Signature	Date
Michon Miller		03/14/24
Kegan Ewert		03/14/24
Nick Simon		3/14/24
Paul Schaffer		3/14/24
Haley	Haley Donley	3/14/24
Melissa Kachmarek	Melissa Kachmarek	3/14/24
Mitchell Vaughn		3/15/24
Lance Hallquist		3/15/24
Nikkia Borchert		3.15.24
Taylor Jegg		3.15.24
RICHARD HANSON		3.15.24

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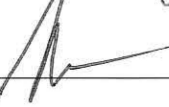
NAME	Signature	Date
Logan Opse		3/15/24
Taylor Jaworsky		3-15-24
Dominic Eckstrom		3-15-24
SCOTT COLLINS		3-15-24
James Rydberg		3/15/24
Bryan George		3/15/24
Shaylee Hayes		3/15/24
Imma Memic		3/15/24
Sean Tibowin		3/15/24
Johnnie Gilbert		3/15/24
Ashley Goebel		3/15/24

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NAME	Signature	Date
DAN GODLEWSKI		3-15-24
Doug Green		3-15-24
DAVE DOWS		20240316
Sheila Ecker		3/15/24
Beau Musgjerd		3/15/2024
Arz Hanson		3-15-24
JASON ROSS		3/15/24
MIKE PETERSON		3/15/24
DOUG WEISER		3/15/24
Ella Robeck		3/15/24
Jim Rourke		3/15/24

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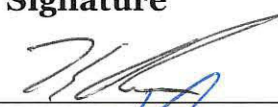






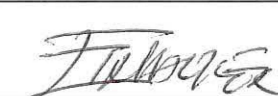


NAME	Signature	Date
Laura Morgan	Laura Morgan	3/15/24
Hailey Johnson	Hailey Johnson	3/15/24
Jenni Bonnet	Jenni B	3/15/24
Kameron Oeschlager	Kameron Oeschlager	3/15/24
Dylan Landenbach	Dylan Landenbach	3/15/24
Diendonne Kamana	Diendonne Kamana	3/15/2024
Dexter Pfeiffer	Dexter Pfeiffer	3-15-2024
LEONARD, ERIC	Eric Leonard	03-15-2024
Kenonica Curright	Kenonica Curright	3-15-2024
Amanda Gardner	Amanda Gardner	3/15/24
ADAM WALKER	Adam Walker	3/15/24

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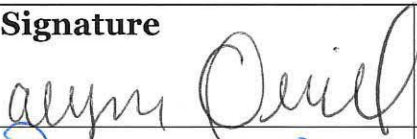
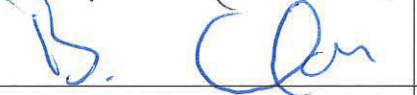


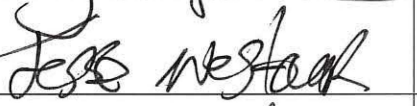

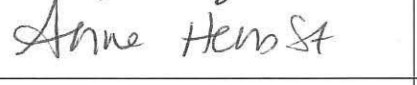




NAME	Signature	Date
Tomasko, Kevin		3-15-24
Jesberg, Joshua		3/15/24
Adam Goldsmith		3/15/24
David Rinehart		3/15/24
Matthew Boche		3-15-2024
MICHAEL WALLS		3-15-24
Tanya Carby		3-16-24
Ileazar Walker		3-18-24
Kathleen Erickson		3-18-24
Nicholas Edstrom		3/18/24
Heidi Paumen		3/18/24

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NAME	Signature	Date
ALYSON Olerich		03/15/24
BRYAN Clutter		3-15-24
JAMES Harcombo		3-15-24
Brooke Neussen		03.15.24
Jesse Westaver		3-15-24
Rick BAKER		3/15/24
Anne Herbst		3/15/24
Shelby Trushenski		3-15-24
Laurie Rouger		3-15-24
Ben Hougas		3-18-24
Math Poks		3/18/24

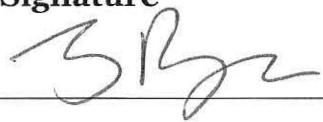


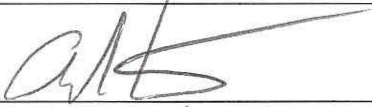
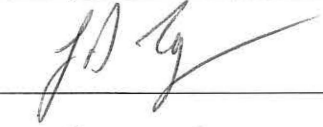

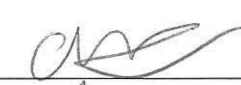



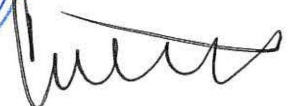


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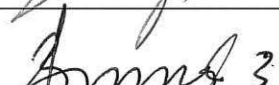
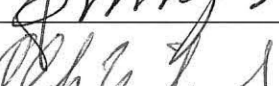
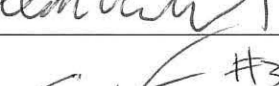


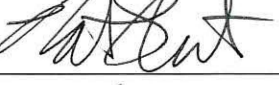


NAME	Signature	Date
Thomas Bergeron		03/18/24
Heather Pickett		3-18-24
Keith Kobiznic		3/18/2024
Adam Fieldseth		03/18/24
J.D. Coolidge		3/18/2024
Jennifer Partlow		3/18/2024
Allen Graf		3/18/2024
Jocelyn Kurth		3/18/2024
Jessica K. Obermiller		3/18/2024
Jacob Severson		3-18-24
Caleb Callies		3/18/24

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NAME	Signature	Date
Kegan Ewert		3-18-24
Michelle Maine	 3469	03-18-2024
Paul Hurling	 335	3/18/24
E. D. [unclear]	 3468	3/18/2024
Alck Miskul		3/18/24
Steve Tziel	 #3308	3/18/24
Sam Cox		3/18/24
Nathan Dittbenner		3/18/24
Mike Wise		3/18/24
Nathan Kowalke	 477	3/18/24
Matt Adenberg	 361	3-18-24




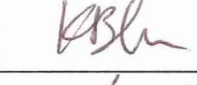






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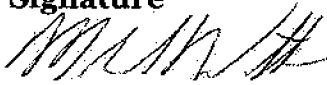

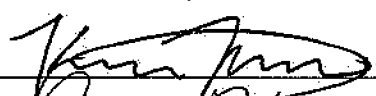
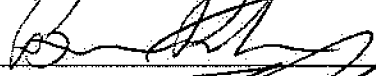


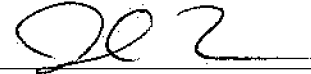


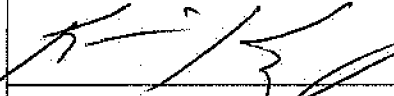
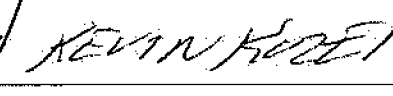

NAME	Signature	Date
Nolan Voss		3-19-24
Kayleigh Fogarty		3-19-24
PAUL MICKELSON		3-19-24
Kayla Blom		3-19-24
Heather Ninesfeldt		3-19-24
Travis Bakken		3-19-24
Matthias Vetsch		3-19-24
Jan Bergstrom		3-21-24

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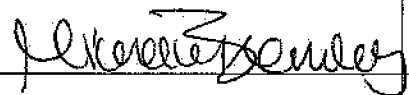


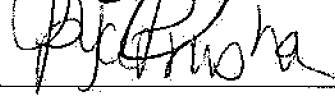


NAME	Signature	Date
Michael Witter		3/14/24
Katelin Bahl		3/14/2024
Katya Knegeev		3/14/24
Brian L. Rinehart		3/15/24
		3-15-24
Jed Loftus		3-15-2024
Linda Skala		3/15/24
John Anderson		3/16/2024
		3/16/24
Steven Schutz		3/16/24

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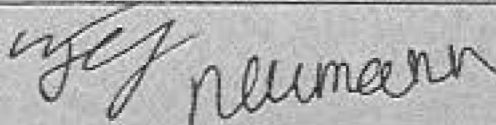
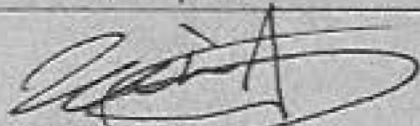




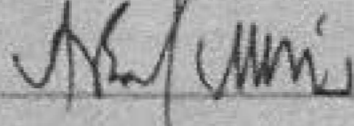

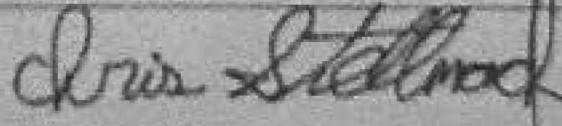
NAME	Signature	Date
Margaret Bromley		3-17-2024
Christian Villafane		3/17/24
Kim Saenz		3-18-24
Joyce Pruska		3-20-24
<del>Seth Hummel</del> ↔ Seth Hummel		3-20-24
Sean Grivette		3-20-24
Jessica Buggisbey		3-20-24

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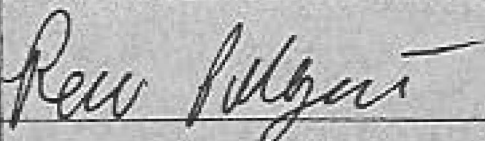
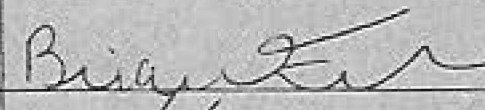

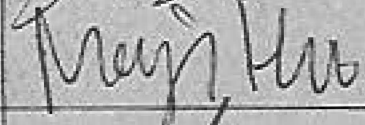
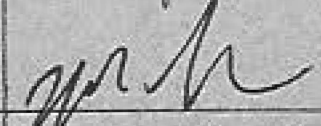
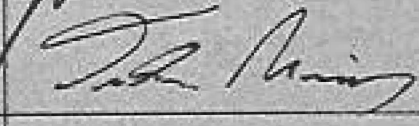

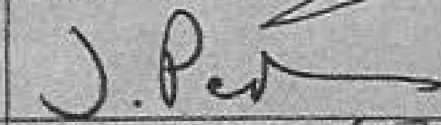


NAME	Signature	Date
Ty Neumann		3-24-24
Nick Sweeney		3-24-24
STAN BRANK		3-25-24
Hunter Wicklund		3/26/24
Walter Johnson		03/26/2024
ASHLEE LARSON		3-26-24
Amy Belen Morris		3-26-24
Jack Simat		3-26-24
Chris Stellmach		3-27-24

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NAME	Signature	Date
Reece Podgorski		3/24/24
Brian Fuhrmann		3/24/24
Leo Yang		3/24/24
Marilyn Holt		3/24/24
Josh Følven		3/24/24
TRISTAN MIROVSKY		3/24/24
Murphy Chelzy		3/24/24
Jeff Pedersen		3/24/24
Chantal Penney		03/24/24
Meghan Hazelwood		3/24/24



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NAME	Signature	Date
Zachary Swenson	Zach Swenson	3/24/2024
Jamal Elhindi	Jamal Elhindi	3/24/24
Peter Zimprich	Peter Zimprich	3/24/24
Michael Thasly	Michael Thasly	3/24/24
Faith Kowitz	Faith Kowitz	3/24/24
Colo Separa	Colo Separa	3/25/24
Brianna Drewes	Brianna Drewes	3/25/24
Dakota Faust	Dakota Faust	3/25/24



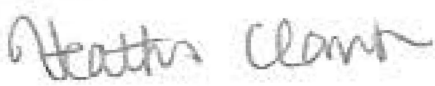






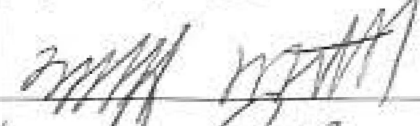




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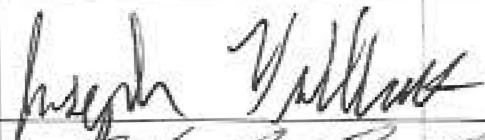

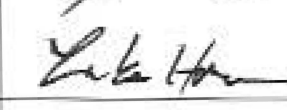

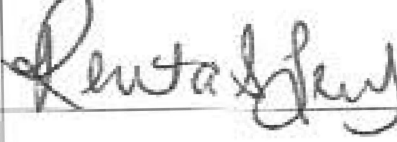
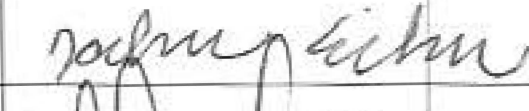
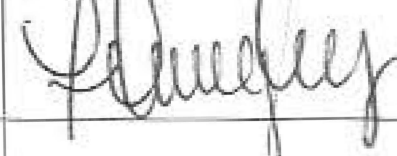
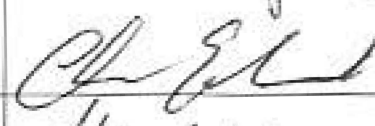


NAME	Signature	Date
Heather Clanton		4/1/24
Melissa Tverberg		4/1/24
Rob Ruyter		4/2/24
Cori Hennings		4/1/24
Kaitlin Hoffmann		4/1/24
Nick Johnson		4/1/24
Chris Mazur		4/1/24
Zachary Martaler		4-1-24
Laurin Waspala		4-1-24
Nathan Roemer		4-3-24

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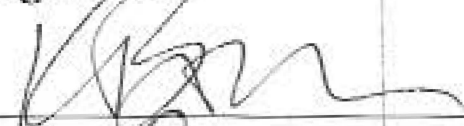


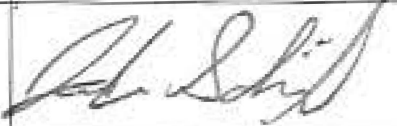



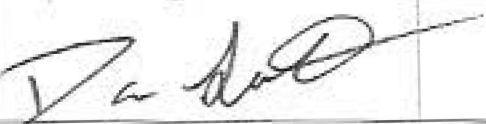


NAME	Signature	Date
Joseph Vollbrecht		4/1/2024
Kyle Shea		4/1/2024
Luke Huson		4-1-2024
Andrew Wallisch		4-1-2024
Renita Lewis		4.1.24
Jackson Erickson		4-1-2024
Fawn Quigley		4-2-2024
Charan Gobind		4-2-2024
Josh Orsatt		4/2/2024
ERIC STEMPER		4/3/24

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NAME	Signature	Date
Kimberley Bodem		4-3-24
Alex Vars		4-3-24
David Carlson		4-3-24
Jacob Scheierl		4-3-24
Shannon Hunter		4-3-24
Bill Ramsey		4-3-24
Jeremy Leavel		4-3-24
Dan Lothert		4-3-24
Evan Morgan		4/4/24
David Wermerskiden		4/5/24



**TESTIMONIAL #1**  
**(Burnsville Dispatcher)**

I became a 911 dispatcher/telecommunicator in July 2022. Before transitioning to this role and organization I was working as a Deputy. Having experience from both sides of the radio gives me a unique perspective; both jobs are challenging and crucial. Not including schooling for Law Enforcement, my training was 3-4 months longer to become a Dispatcher than it had been to get off FTO as a Deputy. During that time, I found that being a dispatcher is far more complex than being an officer; we have to be faster with our actions during our entire shift and not just during critical moments along with multi-tasking in more ways than you can imagine.

Another thing is that as dispatchers, at least at my agency, we more often than not work longer hours than officers. As a Deputy I worked 10-hour shifts and only every now and then went over that time frame. As a Dispatcher I am very often, usually two or more times a week working 12-, 14-, and 16-hour shifts. This results in mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion, time away from my husband and kids, little time for self-care or even getting more than 6 hours of sleep.

As Dispatchers we are abused, berated, exhausted, and mentally/emotionally impacted by the public. I have been sworn at more times than I can remember, something that surprisingly didn't occur as often as a Deputy. I have assisted families through multiple hangings and emergency medical situations, heard people screaming, crying, and physically fighting during domestic situations, heard the panic of parents as they have realized their child is either missing or hurting themselves, and many more situations full of distraught and chaos. My most recent experience has been the worst I could ever have during my career; I was working during the Burnsville incident on Feb 18, 2024. The stress and trauma from that incident is different than what the first responders on scene have but it is NOT less. I am experiencing many symptoms of trauma and grief, as are many of my coworkers here in dispatch.

We may sit behind a desk "safely" but that does not change the impact this job has on us. I loved being a Deputy and I love being a Dispatcher, but I have had far more chronic stress from being a Dispatcher. We are the first to speak to people, we are the resources and eyes/ears for our responders, and we are deeply affected mentally, emotionally, and physically by our job. We deserve to be labeled as First Responders and to receive the same benefits as them because just as it takes a unique and strong person to be a Police Officer, Fire Fighter, and Paramedic, it takes the same person to be a 911 Dispatcher.

Katarina Monjaras  
911 Dispatcher  
Dakota County



## TESTIMONIAL #2

I have been a Dispatcher for 23 years in St. Louis County. We dispatch more than 170 Police/Sheriff, Fire, and Ambulance services in Minnesota's largest county, more than 7000 square miles. I am also a Dispatcher for the St. Louis County Emergency Response Team, the Duluth Police Tactical Response team, and the Child Abduction Response team. I am a Lead Dispatcher working nights, overseeing one of four crews that work in the center. I have received multiple LifeSaver awards for my work during critical incidents.

Here is my story: I was a News Anchor in Duluth for five years prior to starting this career wanting to make a difference. I was excited to be a part of public safety. In my first few weeks of training, I said to another trainee, "I don't want this job to change me". It has done that very thing. In good ways and in other ways. The day I helped a woman deliver a healthy baby girl; my life changed. I have since assisted in the delivery of two other healthy infants.

I've listened to screams as a drug dealer pointed a gun through a front door and through the commotion a child sleeping on the other side of the wall sat up and was shot in the head. I could hear the pain in the voice of the paramedic who carried this 5-year-old child to the Ambulance and then learned the outcome. Another caller provided a description of the suspect vehicle, when an off-duty officer heard the radio traffic and happened to be following it in his personal vehicle. Squads scrambled toward him as he provided location updates. Two of the squads crashed at an intersection and one of the officers was ejected but survived. My life changed.

I have given CPR instructions to a man whose wife collapsed just after the family left Christmas dinner. He begged her to live. I cried as I heard him say her name and the helplessness in his voice in his fight to keep her alive. I was asked to contact the family and ask them to return to the house. She did not live. My life changed.

I have given CPR instructions to a mother whose child was found underwater at a beach and still have a poignant visual of this mother trying to resuscitate her daughter. She did not live. My life changed.

Among my most blessed CPR calls was at a beach where a grandfather was swimming with his grandchildren. He went underwater and the children found him and brought him to the surface. They were able to get him onto the dock and begin CPR. They resuscitated him and he walked to the ambulance. My life changed.

I was dispatching a pursuit which stopped near a bowling alley where children were playing inside. The K9 Deputy got out of his vehicle and approached the suspect who fired at the Deputy. The Deputy returned fire and the suspect died. This happened on the road in front of a woman in a minivan and two children inside with her. My life changed.

Every call we handle is like a small stone that we put in our backpack until one day it is too heavy to carry. I have attended weekly therapy appointments for PTSD due to the horrific incidents that we deal with every day. 52 appointments. 52 hours of learning to live with the grief that changed me.

We are essential employees. We are required to work when other citizens are told to stay home. During COVID, during snowstorms, during other emergencies. We are Dispatchers and we are essential, outstanding and exceptional!

Sarah Kemp  
Lead 911 Dispatcher  
St. Louis County Sheriff's Office

### **TESTIMONIAL #3**

It's 2 o'clock in the morning, a child calls 911 because her Mother & boyfriend are having a domestic situation that is both verbal & physical. The child is emotional, she has no idea what the address is of the house she's at. The child is pleading with you, the 911 Dispatcher, to PLEASE send help.

It's the middle of harvest season, a call comes into 911 from an emotional Father whose son was riding with him & has fallen out of the tractor & hit his head & they're in the middle of a field.

These are just 2 examples of the MANY, MANY different calls that come into a Dispatch center in this state. Dispatchers in the state of Minnesota are currently categorized as simply "secretaries" - as someone who "just answers the phone" - but the Dispatchers are in some form the 1st First responders. A dispatcher takes the initial burst of emotion/energy a situation. They are trained to be the voice of calm, the voice of reassurance, when a scared child calls in asking for help or an emotional Father is asking for medical help for his son. Day after day, calls of traumatic nature are taken in centers across the State.

Law Enforcement officials, Officers, Deputies, Firefighters, & even Correctional Officers can retire at 55. Dispatchers have to wait to retire until whatever age Social Security has set, which is currently 67. Imagine working as a Dispatcher & taking on another 12 years of calls that cause emotional trauma, all because the State views you simply as a secretary answering a phone. If you or your loved ones needed help in an emergency, would you consider the person who was able to reassure them, determine their location & the resources needed, just a secretary?

The Dispatchers of the State of MN are asking you to consider reevaluating the category our job field is classified as. We're asking for you to allow us to retire at the same age as the First Responders who handle the traumatizing events we dispatch them to. Thank you.

Deb Wettergren  
911 Dispatcher  
Nicollet Co. Sheriff's Office

## **TESTIMONIAL #4**

When I chose to start this career eight years ago, I was pregnant with my first child and looking for a job I could be proud of to provide for my family. I didn't know if I could handle it or if I wanted to. Now, I know I don't want to do anything else. This job becomes part of your blood and your soul. I have missed holidays with my family, story time and bedtime with my children, countless sunny days and worked so much overtime I didn't know what day it was. I have heard assaults, people dying or being killed, been called terrible things, but also helped so many with just my voice. I pick up the phone in the middle of the problem. Not before something has happened. In the middle. Or sometimes after. I am the first one to hear that there is a problem and my job is to try to make it better before the officer gets there. I talk you into putting the gun down away from your temple. I tell you to lock the door to protect yourself from your raging husband. I stay on the phone with you while you hide in a closet terrified because there's someone in your house. I have heard officers get shot and crawl on the ground away from gunfire.

Stress and anxiety are a constant in my life either from the job itself or from the time I have missed in my personal life. I have lost patches of hair and have high blood pressure. But, I never want to do anything else. Right now, I am in my thirties, but I don't know how I will be able to handle this job in my fifties or sixties. Technology changes daily along with the physical toll that all the stress continues to take on my body and mind. Retiring early or quitting when I can't do the job anymore is the reality we all face in this line of work. Mistakes are life and death and this job is not kind to those getting older. I will do this job until I can't anymore because it is part of me. I want to do this. I feel like it is my duty to help people and to keep everyone safe. We are first responders even if we don't ever see who we talk to on the phone or the radio. We aren't just a secretary or a receptionist. Reclassify us as first responders because that's what we deserve.

Jenna Pulvermacher  
911 Dispatcher  
Anoka County Dispatch

## TESTIMONIAL #5

A day in the life of a dispatcher. Close your eyes, put yourself in the center, you are the dispatcher. You are dispatching for The Duluth Police Department, have fifteen plus active calls on the board, all of your squads are out on calls, ten pending calls; some of which you believe a squad should go to right away, one squad asks you to call the medical examiner on a death call, you call the M.E., phones are ringing, while on the phone with M.E. another squad calls out a traffic stop, you enter the stop check the registered owners driving status and check for warrants all while still on the phone with the M.E., phones are ringing, you hang up with M.E. and see an attempt to locate come in on a reckless driver but it is on the highway so you call state patrol to advise, it then goes across the bridge to Wisconsin hitting someone on the bridge, you call Wisconsin to advise of attempt to locate, phones are ringing, Squad asks for medical to be sent to a person in a parking ramp stairwell not responding, you dispatch fire/medical, phones are ringing, squads at the ramp are asking you to run and attach 4 names to the call, fire department on another medical is asking for law enforcement for an aggressive patient but all your squads are tied up, phones are ringing, you get a water emergency on Lake Superior come in of a swimmer who got caught in a rip current, phones ringing.....there is not enough people to answer...you answer the phone and it is a woman screaming help her child is not breathing. Now, you are her lifeline as well as all of the squads you are dispatching for. All of that pressure is on you. All those lives are in your hands. This is 911.

Hello, my name is Krysten and I have been a dispatcher for three and a half years. To fully understand our center, I must start by giving you some background information on where I come from. I am a dispatcher for St. Louis County, the largest county in Minnesota. St. Louis County is home to more than 200,000 people and has a diverse landscape which includes cities, ports, lakes, forests, wetlands, trails, mines, and two Indian reservations. Our county is the gateway to both the Boundary Waters Canoe Area and to Lake Superior, the greatest of the Great Lakes. It consists of 27 cities, 72 townships, 75 unorganized townships and portions of two reservations. In total our center is responsible for dispatching 185 different agencies. These include Law enforcement agencies, Fire Departments, First Responders, Ambulances, and our Rescue Squad. Although we dispatch them, we are also responsible for working closely with our partner agencies such as MN State Patrol, many different public works, Air Medical, Medical Examiner, Tow Companies, Hospitals, and our neighboring Counties.

In our center, each person is trained at six different "boards." The boards are South County Law, North County Law, Duluth Police Department, South County Fire/Duluth Fire, North County Fire, and Call Taking. At any given moment, you must be ready to be able to dispatch any of these boards. While dispatching, you are also expected to be able to answer the phone as needed. This may lead to you being on the phone doing CPR or dealing with an in-progress burglary/robbery/assault all while also dispatching (at any board). This can also put you in the position of being the dispatcher on a priority call (example: fire dispatcher dispatching a structure fire) and picking up the phone and it being a miniscule barking dog complaint or another priority call (CPR, Burglary, Assault, Robbery, Structure Fire, Security Alarm, etc.) This

can be extremely stressful as you may imagine.

Most of us try to leave work at work but it can prove very difficult at times. Even though we do not go to the scene, we are there from the beginning to the end. We are there when the caller is crying out for help because their vehicle rolled over in a water filled ditch, we are there dispatching an officer and medics to help, we are there calming the caller down and reassuring them we have sent help, we are there when the officers arrive first on scene and call out exactly what they are seeing, we are there now hearing the screams on the phone and the panic in the officers voice, and we are there when the line disconnects...everyone clears...and no comments are typed in the call. We are here, left wondering what happened. Anyone who has been in dispatch will tell you a similar story. We are the first first responders and we are there through it all, yet we are the last ones people think of and are almost never given the ending to the story. That takes a huge mental toll. The secondary trauma and stress of this job has impacted most of us emotionally, physically, and mentally. There are calls that we don't talk about because we can still hear the voice. I have only been dispatching for three and a half years and I have been involved in a number of barricaded subjects, officer involved shootings (one of which our K9 officer was killed in the line of duty), fatality crashes, a homicide, a plane crash, and CPR calls. I was dispatching fire/medical at the time that we had a domestic turn into a barricaded subject with a hostage, I can still hear the officer scream over the radio "shots fired! send medical send medical code 3 code 3!". That was me. They were asking for me. I had no idea who was hurt. Those were some of the longest moments I have ever had to go through. They finally called out that K9 officer Luna was shot. The days that followed her death were quiet and depressing. There was a funeral procession. I still cannot listen to the sound of bagpipes playing without going back to that moment because that is what they played as they carried her casket out of the vet. As "funny" as it sounds, I cannot even watch dog movies anymore or anything that has anything sad for a dog because it brings me back to the officer screaming over the radio. That happens to me, and I never went on scene... all of us dispatchers have similar stories, and I cannot stress enough how just because we are not there does not mean we don't experience what is happening to the fullest extent. In training, which for me was about 7-8 months, I had given CPR instructions more times than people who have been a dispatcher for many years. My highest count was 3 CPR calls in one shift. I still don't know the ending to most of those calls, and the mental cost from that is great.

This job is a lot. Not only do we have to endure stress, compassion fatigue, PTSD, and other mental health issues; but we also endure physical symptoms from the job as well. Our eyes are strained from staring at computer screens for ten plus hours a day while sitting in a dark room. I have noticed when I leave work in the daylight it's painful and takes a while for my eyes to adjust to the natural light. When I leave at night, I find myself feeling as if the night is even darker and the lights are brighter, making driving a bit difficult. This has worsened since working in dispatch. Our ears are constantly being affected by the volumes needed to hear on the radio and phone. Having someone scream and yell in your ear is a regular occurrence as well as excited K9 officers barking in your ear. I have talked to retired dispatchers who after many years

of service could tell a difference in hearing. I have also noticed a change in my health from not being able to move around much during the day. We are lucky to have standing desks but as for walking, we cannot leave our desks for very long amounts of time.

Every single one of us (dispatchers) chooses to be here even though the load is heavy, and the takeaway is minimal. I love my job. I choose to bear the immense burden of the job because I love helping people. The toll is great though, and there comes a time when it becomes too much for people who have been here for many years. I have seen many dispatchers have to stay past when they were capable in order to be able to retire with full retirement benefits. I believe this not only puts more pressure and stress on their partners, but also affects the safety of many people (callers, firefighters, responders, paramedics, law enforcement). This is not a job where you can lack in any department. You need to be on top of your game one hundred percent of the time. Your response time cannot slow. Seconds matter in this job and can be life or death. I have seen many of the retired dispatchers who did stay past time have slower response times which did affect the call. You must be ready for anything. You must be ready for them to call out one running, vehicle pursuit, shots fired. You must be prepared to type as fast as you can and think even faster. You must be able to hear them and see your screens adequately. You must be able to multitask. But the reality of this job is that the job wears you down, like I have previously stated, and by the time we are able to retire we are not doing the job at one hundred percent. I cannot stress enough how dangerous this is, for everyone.

It is now that we have come to you to request a reclassification for dispatchers to First Responders. This change would be immense for the dispatch world and would provide relief knowing that we do not have to continue to do the job when we know we are not one hundred percent capable of doing the job. I only hope I have given you a glimpse of our daily lives. We give everything to this job. We give up our family time, our home life, our normal schedule, our sleep, our mental well-being, our physical well-being, our lives... all to help others. We only hope you see this too, and that we have earned the title First Responder.

I am 911. I am the calm voice in the chaos, the light in the darkness, the unseen responder: the first First Responder. And on your worst day I hope I can be there for you too.

Krysten Selhorst  
911 Dispatcher  
St. Louis County

## TESTIMONIAL #6

As I sit here and write this, it is hard for me to know where to start. Let's start with the definition of a secretary: definition taken from dictionary.com

*noun, plural* **sec·re·tar·ies.**

1. a person, usually an official, who is in charge of the records, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and related affairs of an organization, company, association, etc.:

*the secretary of the Linguistic Society of America.*

2. a person employed to handle correspondence and do routine work in a business office, usually involving taking dictation, typing, filing, and the like.

On the surface this definition loosely fits a 911 dispatcher. We type out correspondences we have with the public, the police, the firefighters and the paramedics. We create calls which turn into public records. But we don't work Monday through Friday 9-5. We don't get to sit around a water cooler discussing the news or office gossip. Now I'm not saying a secretary has an easy job, I am not a secretary, nor have I ever been, but what I do every day is not a "secretarial" job.

I have worked for Minneapolis for 5 years. I started during the Pandemic and was there the day George Floyd died. I have been there almost every day since. I was there for the riots, through the city on fire, through civil unrest, through the Capitol of the United States being stormed. At Minneapolis we are constantly short staffed both in officers and dispatchers. We work ten plus hours a day and for a while were only getting one day off. This job takes more than time away from you. It changes you in ways you can't even imagine.

During this time we took thousands of calls a day. Calls from citizens threatening to rape us or our families, threatening to come find us and kill us. They threatened to blow up our homes, cars and where we worked because they assumed we condoned the murder of George Floyd. And it was a murder. We also took calls from people terrified and heart broken because their livelihoods were on fire. Terrified because a peaceful protest had turned into a blood bath and rioters were preventing medical attention from reaching those who desperately needed it.

I have personally been on the phone with someone taking their last breaths of life. This man had been walking up to his home and had started to unlock his front door when another man walked up behind him and shot him in the chest before running away. This man had enough life left in him to call 911, give me his address, tell me he had been shot in the chest then take his last breath. I was the last voice he ever heard but he wasn't the last person I was on the phone with while they died.



I have had to talk a teenager and her siblings through crawling out her bedroom window to the police and firefighters waiting below because her father was holding their mother hostage at knifepoint. Talked to an 8 year old as he watched his mother shoot his father during an argument and many other countless situations.

I have talked people out of killing themselves and been there for callers who have found a loved one dead. The helplessness we feel is like nothing else I have ever felt. Yes we are on the phone and get a call started but we aren't PHYSICALLY there to get a man off of a woman who is raping her, we aren't there to carry a child into another room so they don't have to see their parents hurting each other, or put pressure on a dying man's wounds so he maybe has a chance to live.

On the radio side we hear firefighters call out they are trapped in a burning or collapsed house. We hear officers call out they need help because they are fighting with someone or being shot at or have been stabbed. We hear the panic in their voices, the desperation to live and we have to always remain calm. We have to always take action and push aside our own trauma to get the job done.

We look at at least six to eight computer screens, handle anywhere from five calls to thirty by ourselves all at once. We have to remember details, locations, suspect descriptions, and many other things for every single call and keep them straight for when a responder on scene asks for that information.

A secretary doesn't have to deal with half of what we do. We miss time with family, time with friends, time with ourselves. We have no time to take care of ourselves mentally, emotionally and physically. This job gives us trauma as much as any other first responder yet we are treated lesser than by the government. Our benefits don't reflect the mental health needs we crave and desperately need. Nor do we get the same health benefits a police officer or firefighter gets. We also have to work longer into our lives before we can retire with a decent pension. This job doesn't just take your time, your energy and your mental health; it takes a part of who you are. We deserve to be recognized as first responders because we are THE first person in an emergency a citizen calls for help.

Alexandra Swanson  
911 Dispatcher  
City of Minneapolis

## TESTIMONIAL #7

My name is Darcy Ziller and I am a Public Safety Telecommunicator (PST) in Cook County. I fell into this profession quite by accident just shy of 26 years ago.

This was not the career I had initially intended. I will go so far as to say I've never heard anyone say they want to grow up to be a 911 dispatcher. I believe this is mostly in part because very few outside of public safety understand the role we play. Unfortunately, this also includes the groups of people tasked with deciding our worth.

As a long serving member of the profession, I have to accept some of the blame for this. I, like so many others, always preferred to do our work behind the scenes and not be especially vocal about the work that we do. Most people now get their ideas about what we are based on what they see on TV or in movies, or the rare headlines when we do something very well or very badly. We have done ourselves a disservice that we now need to put right.

Although different agencies may call us by different titles, we in Public Safety Communications perform ultimately the same duties across the state. We are the very first 1st responders in our community's emergencies, and the lifeline to our law enforcement, emergency medical services and fire department personnel. We are the first incident commander in all events, large or small. We train hard in Emergency Medical Dispatch so that we can provide life support in medical emergencies, such as CPR, blood control in traumatic injuries and accidents, childbirth, anaphylaxis, and choking. We are trained in crisis negotiations, suicidal callers, domestic abuse and assaults, sexual assaults, mental health events, active shooters, Incident Command, missing and abducted children, search and rescue and countless others. We train on how we need to react differently when these calls may involve Veterans with PTSD, children and adults with autism & special needs, and with people with deafness/ hard of hearing.

We are the very first contact for people having the worst day of their lives, and sometimes the last day of their lives. We often have the ability to diffuse hostile and volatile situations before our law enforcement partners arrive, making it safer for both them and our public.

In my almost 26 years serving in an outstate agency, I have coordinated many search and rescue events for missing people inside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area and other wilderness areas. I have performed CPR by phone countless times, frequently when either or both the caller and patient are known to me personally. I've walked a father through the delivery of his baby, spent many hours on the line with both suspects and victims in domestic assault or other high intensity situations in order to render the scene as safe as possible for our law enforcement responder's arrival. I've developed a 911 for Kids program that has allowed us to visit with young elementary students and teach them how and when to call 911. I've moved on to a program that

will allow me to instruct other 911 professionals in active shooter events that may allow us to buy back some time between the initial call and the first officer's contact with the suspect. We save seconds, and seconds save lives. I, like the hundreds of emergency communications professionals around the state, spend my time leaping from emergency to emergency in order to try to calm the chaos suffered by our communities.

I, like the rest of us, have done this with no small cost to my own personal life. Families often struggle with missing us during our night, weekend or holiday shift rotations. The horrors that stay in our ears when the shift is over can affect the way we interact with our spouses, children, parents and friends. We can't always explain to our children why they can't go to a particular friend's house for a sleep over because we know that address from things such as domestics, drugs or child abuse calls. We can't tell our husband the massive heartache we have from trying to walk a 80 year old woman through CPR on her husband of 50 years, but her wrists are too weak to do compressions and we just have to wait until EMS arrives to take over. Talking to someone as they are in the process of killing themselves and are only calling to let us know where to find their body, or a person calling for themselves having a medical crisis and they are all alone and the line goes dead, these are things that we won't forget the sounds of.

In my own case, between the stress and the shiftwork, it took my husband and I six years to be able to get pregnant with our first child. Now, two children later, they can tell you things like exactly what is situational awareness. They count the exits in large buildings and scan the crowds of any event we attend for people who just don't look right. They will also warn any newcomer that when mom arrives home from work, if she walks to the garden instead of the door, it's best to stay away and wait for her to come in on her own time. You may wonder why we do this, when the pay, benefits, stress and hours are such a challenge. For many of us, once we have changed a life for the better, saved a life, helped turn a life around or been able to steer a situation into not turning into a fatality, we're hooked. For every incredible moment we get to have a hand in, we can handle so many more bad ones.

The Occupational Information Network (O\*NET), which is part of the US Department of Labor, recently listed Public Safety Telecommunicators as #8 in their list of the country's most stressful occupations (out of 873 occupations). In 2022, Police1 Magazine listed Public Safety Telecommunicators as #1 most stressful job in Public Safety.

To be classified as clerical/administrative gives zero consideration to the role that we are central to in emergencies. Reclassification of this profession is well past due. We clearly do not fit the administrative & clerical class we are currently assigned. Our duties and expectations do not align with what the public expects of us. With reclassification, we may be eligible for more support and be on par with our other emergency services partners for training, PTSD services, and possibly even retirement changes. Thank you for taking the time to be educated on the

particulars of this profession, and in your consideration in giving it a more appropriate classification.

Darcy Ziller  
911 Public Safety Telecommunicator/Jailer  
Cook County Sheriff's Office

## TESTIMONIAL #8

Almost exactly 4 years ago, just a couple of months before my 19th birthday, and not even a year after graduating high school, I put on a headset and plugged into a dispatch console for the first time. I didn't know at the time, but this career would begin to affect almost every aspect of my life, both negatively and positively.

I sit here, tethered to my console as I write this, and I'm struggling immensely in placing my words in a way that conveys exactly what I am trying to say properly. Honestly, I don't know that I can put it into words in a way that's less than novel length, because this career entails so much.

This career is both rewarding and lacks reward at the same time. We are the "unseen heroes", the true FIRST first responders. We are hidden, in my case quite literally in a basement, and the people who call us on the worst days of their lives aren't thinking about the person on the other side of the phone. When they do, and we get a true, genuine, thank you, that is one of the most rewarding experiences for a dispatcher.

This career gives you a great amount of responsibility and purpose, and for me, it gives me reason. It inspires me and has taught me a great deal not just about my community but also society in general. I knew the second I answered my first phone call that this would be tough, but that it was my calling. I had no idea what sacrifices would need to be made along the way, but I knew they would be worth something.

Us dispatchers sit for hours at a time and we use the bathroom when time allows. We aren't allowed an hour lunch break, or even a half an hour lunch break. We heat up our food when the calls slow down, and we are all much too used to eating cold food and taking bites between calls and transmitting on the radio with food in our mouths. Sometimes, we finish our 12 hour shift and realize that we didn't see the light of day a single time during it.

Countless holidays and family gatherings are missed because a dispatch center needs to be staffed, even on Christmas. There are birthdays and anniversaries that we cannot be there to celebrate, mandated and unexpected forced overtime each month that forces us to cancel the plans we've made with people we haven't seen in years because we work night shift and sleep through the entire day while everybody else is out living.

We are classified as secretaries, and NOTHING we do is secretarial from the content we deal with to the hours we work.

There isn't any extensive research involving dispatchers and mental health, not in the same way there is for other first responders, however, per a national study conducted in 2015 (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25964163/>), approximately 24.6 percent of 911 telecommunicators may suffer from post traumatic stress disorder. We aren't on scene to see what other first responders do, but we are still there for it.

We hear the panic of a home nurse who just started CPR on a 4 year old boy, the cries of a wife who just found her husband hanging in the garage, the small voice of a child who is witnessing her father hit her mother.. We sit, chained to a desk with a cord, holding our breaths as we wait for our officers' backup to arrive after we check their status and the only response we get is silence. We stay stoic, but helpless as we listen to our officer call out for emergency backup because he's fighting with a person at a traffic stop.

Those are all real life examples of situations that I, and many other 911 dispatchers have experienced.

I have witnessed the way this career can break a person down after too many years of helping others, not enough breaks and not enough support or understanding from people outside of this industry.

As the years go by and we all get older, our eyesight and hearing start to falter, our patience fades, the multi-tasking skills we once had are no longer there and our general mental capacity begins to diminish. It's inevitable and happens to everybody, not just dispatchers.

This is a career that I can see myself retiring in, but I will NOT be able to effectively do this job until I am 65 years old. That is 43 more years of my skills slowly fading, and by the time I hit the age of 45, I will no longer be anywhere near as efficient as I am today.

My request as you read these testimonies is to please consider the type of career that 911 dispatch truly is while using these personal statements to reconsider how 911 dispatchers are classified, and to genuinely weigh the benefits of expanding the dispatchers pension benefits and lowering the retirement age.

Although we aren't seen, our sacrifices aren't any less than the ones our other first responder colleagues make. We are the ones behind the scenes that allow for the rest of the community of first responders to effectively do their jobs. Without 911 dispatchers, there would be no first responders.

Samantha Gust  
Anoka County Emergency Communications Center

## TESTIMONIAL #9

My name is Joy Hill with St Louis County Communications, 911 dispatch. In my last 24 years of service with the county, I have answered the call of duty as the first, first responder as a call taker and police/fire dispatcher. The biggest part of my job is to provide appropriate help with emergency or non-emergency services in a timely manner.

I am proud of what I do. Not anyone can do this job. Dispatchers multitask many things at once. We can listen with one ear in our headset to a 911 call or radio traffic while listening with the other ear to what else is going on in the room. The sacrifice has been great. My family life has suffered. Dispatchers do not take any day off at a time, we pick our days of vacation a year in advance. Dispatchers miss Christmas and birthday celebrations. Our shifts are long and sometimes we are forced to work extra hours to compensate for a sick dispatcher. As dispatchers, we sit for 10-12 hours during a shift with few breaks and only if there is time to leave the room. There are times I get 4 hours of sleep combined with a 60 minute commute which happened after the consolidation of the north dispatch center into the south center several years ago.

There are the calls my mind will never forget. The young man trapped in a burning vehicle who did not survive hearing the pleading of the caller for help, the suicidal male with a distorted voice after shooting himself in the face in which I had to stay on the line with him until squads determined it was safe to enter, the heartbreak in the voice of a father after finding his son with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head and deceased. The stories do not end. After a traumatic call, we brush it off, pick ourselves up and move on performing our duties quickly while keeping up with a fast pace workload. One time when working as the fire dispatcher, there was a house fire. Well into the call, fire personnel asked for a medical dispatch. Confused, I paged the ambulance to respond to the location. Fire personnel had discovered the body of an infant in an upstairs bedroom, no one was home with the infant at the time of the fire. I did not have any further information of the circumstances which alone causes stress. Not knowing any further outcome, I continued with my shift as if I was not affected by this incident. It wasn't until the debriefing did I discover the circumstances of the call. As dispatchers, most of the time do not know the result of what happened.

Most recently, I received a stork pin for assisting over the phone with the delivery of a baby. What an honor! At the time I did not feel that way. I was terrified for the lives of the mother and baby. The delivery was not normal and Emergency Dispatch protocols did not cover such a delivery. Shaking inside, I had to remain calm and collective so as to not alarm the female caller. Another obstacle was the female caller was alone. I did the best I could to advise using practical knowledge and help her get through the delivery. The baby was born without incident while ambulance personnel and law enforcement officers entered the room. What was minutes, seemed like hours for them to get on scene. I remember thinking while they were on scene what is going

on? Is the baby still alive? Are they providing life saving support? When the ambulance went enroute to a local hospital and not the trauma center, I felt some relief that perhaps everything was fine. I had difficulty settling down afterwards, playing the incident over again in my mind. This lasted a few days in which it was in my thoughts still wondering if everything was okay. What if it had not been a good ending?

These are just a few accounts of what we do as first, first responders in the dispatch center. I am appealing to you and the delegates who will be determining the fate for those of us asking for a reclassification of this field of work. We are forgotten and unseen, but the silent stress lives within for the rest of our lives. I carry many scars, but my sacrifice to this profession has left me with a high sense of loyalty and compassion for others. Because of my age, I am glad to be leaving soon (I'm tired) and hope for an earlier retirement and boost in benefits for those remaining. Thank you.

Joy Hill  
911 Dispatcher  
St. Louis County Sheriff's Office



## TESTIMONIAL #10

In between the firefighters' red line, the white line of EMS personnel and the blue line of the police, is woven the thinnest gold line that ties them all together. It is that gold line allows the others to communicate, it provides synchronization and information. The gold line is that of the 911 telecommunicator. In the words that follow, I will share what I've learned in my five years as a 911 telecommunicator and show you how critical that golden line is to all the others.

In every emergency there exists a point at which the situation exceeds the control of those involved in it. It is at that point that it is decided that additional help is needed. Consider for a moment, how fortunate for those in that situation, that there is a single phone number that they can call to get the help of every possible kind in only a matter of moments. One number to call for police, fire, ambulance, air ambulance, suicide crisis center, tow trucks, aviation support, power and gas companies, social services and so much more available by calling one number. That one number to send highly trained experts in every critical field directly to the victims of any, and every, tragedy.

Now, consider the people who answer all of the calls to that number. They may be called telecommunicators, dispatchers, operators or some other name. They must be knowledgeable and proficient in all aspects of law, emergency medicine, the environment, psychology, sociology, human nature, grief counseling, technology, communication and most any other discipline that can be considered within the realm of emergency management. They must be able to gather information while talking on a phone, to inform responders while talking on a radio, to direct additional responders on another radio, to page out more responders on a paging system, to search multiple local, state and federal databases, and to document all of the information and their actions in real time. Emergencies occur around the clock, so these people have to be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. When not engaged in active emergencies, these people routinely manage records, enter warrants for the courts, manage protection orders and complete numerous other administrative functions. They answer general questions regarding the criminal justice process, direct callers to experts of all manner of problems and sometimes they go out and teach children about calling 911.

If someone had given me this to ponder five years ago when I sought to become a 911 telecommunicator, I'd have been overwhelmed and completely awed. The true depth of knowledge required to be proficient in this position is staggering. The ability to multitask is mind boggling, as I routinely perform all of the functions listed above, nearly all at once. The cost of failure at any of those functions is death.

It was only five years ago that I took this position. Prior to that, I spent 21 years in the United States Army Reserve as Military Police. In that capacity, I provided security to US personnel and

bases all over the world, I worked in correctional facilities internationally, and I served in war. Concurrent to my service, I managed 100,000 square foot big box retail stores for 24 years. In the late 90s, I spent three years patrolling Cedar Rapids, Iowa, a city of around 200,000 people at the time. I thought for certain that those experiences and my Bachelor's Degrees in Criminal Justice Administration and Applied Philosophy had prepared me for anything and everything that this position could throw at me. At this point I could regale you with near countless stories of places I've been, things I've done, the personal peril I've been placed in and the horrors I've seen around the globe. Yet, despite these experiences, I was not as well prepared to take on the life of a 911 Telecommunicator as I thought I was. In taking this position, none of Meritorious Service Medals, Army Commendations, or Navy Achievement Medals, none of my public service awards, mentorship awards or any of the nine lives I've saved from suicide through direct intervention prepared me enough for this life.

I mentioned that the cost of failure in this position is death. That is no understatement. To fail to determine the location of an emergency, or to fail to understand an emergency through only a caller's verbal description, to fail to ask the right questions, to fail to notify the right organizations, to fail to send the right people; any of these failures results in someone's death. To fail in this position does not result in the random death of someone far away. Failure means the death of neighbors, friends and possibly even family. Sometimes failure is not a requirement, no matter how expertly we perform, people still die, even when we do everything right. The people that we serve are not faceless strangers in faraway places. The people who call us in their darkest hour are in our communities. They are our friends, neighbors and sometimes even our families.

It is in those darkest hours that people take advantage of that one number to solve their biggest emergencies in life, their life and death moments, their catastrophic moments. Although my life may not have prepared me for this role, my organization's rigorous training has. I am expert and professional in knowing how to help you when your world is being torn apart. I am who you call, anytime day or night, and I will get you the help you need. I am a 911 Telecommunicator and I am so much more than a secretary. I am the link between you and the resolution of your worst day. I am the first responder to your emergency.

By current classification in the Minnesota Public Employees Retirement Association(PERA), I fall into the Coordinated Plan. This plan applies to all general employees who meet statutory membership requirements and are not eligible for another retirement plan. This puts all of the people in my profession in with other statewide employees who work Monday through Friday during normal business hours, and with those who never have to deal in life-altering emergencies. In fact, when those people have a brush with a life altering emergency, they call us. 911 telecommunicators should be afforded increased benefits from the rest of the employees in the Coordinated Plan. The stressors which we are required to be put through on a daily basis cannot be tolerated by just anyone. Many, many people have tried to do this job, only to

ultimately decide that they cannot perform the numerous, instantaneous functions or they cannot endure the high level of stress. This is not to say that other employees in the Coordinated Plan do not incur stress, but I would challenge you to find another position that deals in our level of stress. I assert that there are not many administrative assistants that wake up having nightmares recalling the actual events of their job.

The role of a 911 telecommunicator is a vital part of the emergency services. We are the first responders to every emergency. We are required to be well versed in every aspect of responding to all types of emergencies. We are the link between the caller and the physical responders. We endure stress and trauma akin to our counterparts in the field. We are far closer to them and their job requirements than we are to administrative staff. For these reasons, I implore you to extend additional benefits in the Public Employees Retirement Association to the heroes that truly answer the call, no matter what they are called.

Damon J. Brunow  
911 Public Safety Telecommunicator  
St. Peter, MN

## TESTIMONIAL #11

My name is Seth Justice, I serve my community as a 911 Dispatcher with St. Louis County and I truly love my job. I find it a real privilege and honor to be with my neighbors during their most dire moments of distress, pain, and fear. It is intimate and raw and deeply human.

I'm asking for your consideration and urging your support of enhanced pension benefits and a decrease in the retirement age for 911 Telecommunicators across the state.

We as 911 Dispatchers are the first, first responders. We are with our community members during their greatest moments, minutes, and seconds of need. We provide lifesaving efforts during the initial response to any and every crisis that can exist. Here in St. Louis County, the largest county this side of the Mississippi, response times for those we dispatch can range from 5 minutes to well over an hour. During that time, we are the ones tasked with providing response for the whole gamut of emergencies that exist, oftentimes changing the outcomes of emergencies before our field responders arrive on scene.

Here's a glimpse of just one hour as a Dispatcher:

A woman is calling and she's frantic. She was on the way to the hospital to give birth to her first child but now her contractions are now under a minute and she can't hold it. So she pulled over on the side of the highway and called 911. You get medical response started but they won't be getting there for another 15 minutes and you realize it is now your job to safely deliver that child with her. She already feels the head. You're keeping her calm, deep breaths, "We're pushing!" "Let's go!" "I'm here with you. You are brave and I need you to focus." That baby is coming out and she's screaming. You are now making sure she is safely delivering. And right then the ambulance arrives. And you get to hear the bawling cry. That first breath of life.

And you take that gift because now you need to hang up as another call is coming in.

This call is a young man, 17 or 18 years old. He's saying the house is up in flames. "Are you outside?" Yes. "Is there anyone else inside?" No. You hear a slight hesitation but you move on to your line of questioning. "Where is it spreading? What is the fire threatening? Can you tell me where the closest hydrant is?" Then you come back to that question you heard hesitancy with: "Are you sure no one else is inside?" He again says no but your gut is leaving you with a different feeling and you know that it is also your job as a Dispatcher to be a human lie detector, your job to know the intonation of when a No is really a Yes. You ask him 10 more times "Who else is in the house? I need you to be honest with me." Your coworkers are now looking at you and wondering why you haven't moved on from the question and then he finally tells you after you ask one more time: "There are two kids inside. A 2 and a 3 year old." He was babysitting and they were asleep on the couch. You accept the truth quickly and then move on.

You update the fire rig and tell them they need to step up the response. “What is the best way to the living room? Front door or back door?” The fire department then arrives on scene and it is now your time to disconnect and let them take it from there. And also another call is coming in. You take that next call but you are listening at the same time the fire radio and you hear, “Two kids safely out. Good job Dispatch.”

You take just a second to take that in because you are on the next call already:

This one’s a 10 year old boy. His name is Elijah. He’s crying, stuttering and tripping over his words. “What’s going on, buddy? What happened?” He’s crying because his dad is hitting his mom again. But this time is different because his dad has a knife. You make sure officers are getting started in the direction and then you need to get an address. You can get a block range because of where the phone is located, but Elijah doesn’t have his address memorized yet. He knows his house is yellow and that his red bike is in the front yard. It’s a good start but you want the actual address for your officers so they know exactly where they are going and no time is lost. You rack your brain for a moment. “Elijah, can you find me a piece of mail? Look on the table for me, buddy.” He finds it and for the first time ever he says his address, number by number. You update your squads. And then you still have 2 minutes before they arrive on scene and this isn’t a call you get to hang up on. These are the longest 2 minutes of your life, how do you distract this child, Elijah, from the pain and violence in the room next door? You stay with him and then hear the officers getting to the house. You stay another minute until he’s safely with them and then you let go.

You’ve got tears running down your face, but you've only got a moment to wipe them away and compose yourself before doing what you do best, finding the courage to answer the call.

I’ve got a whole rolodex of these:

A man giving CPR to his friend after a snowmobile accident. You’re providing clear instructions and motivation although your gut is telling you the entire time that it’s an exercise in futility, still you're leading him in compressions, “One-Two-Three-Four-Five-Six-Seven-Eight-Nine-Ten. Come on Dennis, you’ve got to find the strength! I need you to keep those compressions going until my field responders get to you!” The patient doesn’t make it. But Dennis calls into 911 a week later to thank you for being with him during the most horrendous second of his life.

Or a woman double your age who has a gun to her head and you are talking her down from the edge of suicide. Now you’re in a deeply human conversation about the meaning of life. You’re in a deeply human conversation about knowing that those who love you still love you when they don’t say it. And how to find a gift in the solitude when that solitude of life feels more like the wait of loneliness. How to find hope in this world when none appears present in front of you. You talk her down and she has the gun off her temple before officers arrive on scene.

Or a college student who just found her boyfriend unconscious from an overdose and you're helping her deliver NARCAN for the first time.

Or a grandchild, a young man who sounds pretty similar to you in age, who is with his grandmother on her deathbed. She has a Do Not Resuscitate and he knows these are the final moments. And it is your job to simply be with him and tell him to just hold her hand and be with her. While in the background you're listening to another human's final breaths of life.

These are things you can never erase from your memory and I could keep going, but I think you get my point.

I started my career as a Dispatcher 5 years ago. I got my degree in Philosophy and was then looking to where the helpers were. Where could I provide the greatest impact in the shortest amount of time on this earth? I was planning to become a firefighter, but I then spent a day in dispatch and it changed my life. I started calling Dispatchers "The Conductors of the Chaos" and realized that's where I really belonged. I truly believe Dispatchers are the Better Angels of our society, taking in the immediate real-time traumas of their neighbors in an unseen and often thankless profession. Instead of a limited number of incidents to respond to, they are the ones that take it all in, every emergency you could imagine and worse.

I began my career with the City of Minneapolis. I was there during the pandemic when our society was at a tipping point and then when George Floyd was killed. Mr. Floyd was a friend of my friend's mom and he was killed a half hour before my night shift started. I was there for my community in the immediate aftermath, a city on fire and then crumbling from the inside out. Pretty soon there weren't enough officers to respond to every incident, or officers stopped responding to certain neighborhoods. But that doesn't stop folks from calling 911 in their desperate moment of need. Hundreds of calls not responded to. It was us as Dispatchers who still had the task to stay on with our neighbors during the incidents that would change their lives, and an entire city, forever.

As Dispatchers, we are tasked with taking in the immediate chaos of our society, providing calm and hope to those in distress, and then taking a quick breath and doing it again.

They say only 1 percent of the population can do the job but only 10 percent stick with it. I have seen many new classes come and go, folks who thought that they could handle the job and then quickly realized they couldn't carry the burden that came with it. You have to understand the deep sacrifice of this work so you can figure out how to sustain yourself through it.

911 itself is a pretty strange phenomena. We are at 50 years of 911 existing here in Minnesota. Looking at the timeline of our humanity, 50 years is quite a short amount of time. A short

amount of time for us as a society to have a small, selective group of individuals take on the immediate pains and traumas of a whole community. It is an incredibly heavy burden and I for one don't believe that any human is truly set up to handle that. We rely on these select few to carry this weight so others can live in more bliss - and those taking on this task deserve the dignity and compensation worthy of the task being asked of them.

The calls I just gave you as an example of are within one hour of time, one hour within a 10, usually 12, sometimes 14 or 16 hour shift. And that takes a toll. I have seen that toll in my coworkers who cope by drinking or abusing medications, self harm or isolation. The divorce rate in our profession is incredibly high. As well as the likelihood of depression, PTSD, etc. Statistically, 911 Dispatchers are six times more likely to commit suicide than the rest of the population and three times more likely to be diagnosed with PTSD than law enforcement officers or firefighters. That is due to the cumulative and repetitive vicarious trauma that is the nature of this discipline of first response that we are in.

Dispatchers are incredibly courageous in the way they show up to confront the unknown each day. But no human can be the bravest every day. No human can be the strongest every moment. However, these heroic men and women put aside their fear and uncertainty to be with their neighbors during their greatest moments of need.

We understand that it is only by supporting our neighbors through their darkest moments that they then get to later shine at their brightest. And we diligently take on those moments of darkness so the light can later come.

The hardest part for me is when I see the emptiness in my coworkers eyes - the physical, mental and spiritual exhaustion from the toll of this work day in and day out.

Police, Fire, EMS, and Dispatch. Dispatch is the fourth first responder, some would argue the most critical component of first response. I believe the reason we are often overlooked is because we are mostly unseen, and that is on purpose. We are the invisible glue that holds it all together. But just because we are invisible does not mean that we don't deserve fairness in the dignity of our sacrifice.

I believe that sacrifice is worthy and I hope you do too. I have answered 911 calls until my ears have bled and until I have had tears running down my face. But I have not questioned the worthiness of the sacrifice, the sacrifice we place on a few for the betterment of the whole.

Seth Justice Loeffler-Kemp  
911 Dispatcher  
St. Louis County

## **TESTIMONIAL #12**

My name is Tim Norton and I am a Communications Officer with the Beltrami County Sheriff's Office. I have been with Beltrami County for three years and previously I was with Cass County Sheriff's Office as a Dispatcher five years. In between these two positions I was a deputy and a police officer for different agencies. I also spent a very short time on a local fire department and have been a volunteer first responder (EMR or Emergency Medical Responder) for over ten years.

Whether the job is called a 911 dispatcher, telecommunicator, communications officer, or anything else, the work that is done is rewarding, stressful, and most of all, honorable. When the term first responders is used in society, it generally includes: Police, Fire, and EMS services. Over the years I have contributed to and experienced all three of the above professions to varying degrees. All three, Police, Fire, and EMS are all honorable professions and provide services to the community that are invaluable. The thing that's missing in this equation, and what ties the entire system together is who the public calls for help.

When the public needs help, they call dispatch. When the public needs emergency help, they call 911. They don't call the police officers in their squad cars, or the firemen in their firetrucks, or the ambulance crew in their ambulances. They have a central location and number to call for help, whether emergency or non-emergent. The number to remember here is 911.

In your time of need, you'll call 911. That call could be placed at all hours of the day, on the weekend, on holidays, or any other important date or time to you. That number stays the same, whether you're in Bemidji, MN, Oakland, CA, Missoula, MT, Houston, TX, Miami, FL, or any other location in the United States that you may be. This is the number we teach our kids, elderly parents, or anyone else we love to call in their time of need. This number has developed into the standard-bearer for getting help no matter the time or place.

I'll use the term dispatcher going forward, but this job is a roller coaster of a ride. Where I currently work, we work 12 hour shifts. I work day shift, which comes with its own unique challenges and I have also worked night shift, which is challenging in its own unique way. I've missed anniversaries, celebrations, holidays, I've worked voluntary OT, mandatory OT, all because 911 needs to ALWAYS be available.

Whether it be a suicidal male that is threatening to shoot himself on a deserted road in the middle of nowhere, or a kidnapped child that is missing, or an elderly parent that has fallen and needs an ambulance, or a fight at a bar, or an active burglary where someone is in your house with a weapon, or a mass casualty weather event, or instructing someone to do CPR over the phone for 45 minutes or more, or a vehicle that has fallen through the ice on a lake while fishing, or literally ANY other thing you can think of, people call 911 for help.



Dispatchers answer those calls. Dispatchers get relevant information. Dispatchers stay on the phone with the caller until help arrives. Dispatchers provide CPR instructions over the phone. Dispatchers talk people off the ledge. Dispatchers disseminate public safety messages to neighboring agencies to coordinate services. Dispatchers help keep our Police, Fire, and EMS partners safe. Dispatchers are the ones who page out and send the Police, Fire and EMS to help others. Dispatchers are the HUB; we are the glue that holds this system together. Without dispatchers...this system would be a mess and inoperable.

We are more than just clerical staff.

We are the people you will never see, but will ALWAYS be available to you in your time of need; whenever that may be.

Sincerely,  
Timothy W. Norton  
911 Public Safety Telecommunicator  
Beltrami County Sheriff's Office

## **TESTIMONIAL #13**

I was in a near fatal motorcycle accident on September 27<sup>th</sup> 2007, In the resulting accident I was paralyzed from the chest down, which permanently put me in a wheelchair. I started dispatching in August 2008 in Beltrami County and was trained by the dispatcher that saved my life that day. The training started and was extremely challenging. When I started the dispatch center averaged a call every 2 minutes, as of 2024 we average about a call every minute, in 2008 there was only one dispatcher in the center for from 0500 to 0700, and two on the rest of the twenty two hours, now there are a scheduled of three a shift when fully staffed, which has only happened for less than a total of a year of the 15 years of time I have dispatched here.

For the time I have dispatched you will deal with 911 calls that demand the number to the jail to the non-emergency calls that are children that are not breathing and pass away on the phone, in those times the over 200 different officers from Bemidji police, the Beltrami county sheriff's office, the Blackbuck police, any state patrol or border patrol , along with the three ambulance services, that do not have medical dispatch themselves, and the six fire departments , all of which have said repeated they could never do our job as 911 dispatchers.

It is an extremely stressful career that is a giant resource management system, along with information from callers that are having the worst day of their lives and giving the best information you can get out of their situation , then hopefully, sending the right resources. The evolution of technology has made the job in law enforcement evolve extremely quickly. Which adds additional stress and time away from family, events and friends.

We had bomb threats to the Law Enforcement Center, where dispatch is located, all real clerical staff were evacuated , dispatch was required to stay until a bomb squad came to remove the threat. We were also left in the building where all the clerical staff were evacuated for the riot with over 200 people outside trying to break windows and damaging property, we were still in the building, as law enforcement employees answering medical, fire and assault calls.

I have had the honor of working with some amazing people that worked as dispatchers for over 42 years, which caused catastrophic problems in their personal lives to stay in a job that is still listed as a clerical position, this is where it is essential to upgrade our position within the PERA benefits program.

I appreciate that this was looked over to make the best decision to adapt the shift retirement to the level it should have been years ago.

Thank you for your time,  
Seth Osburnsen  
911 Dispatcher  
Beltrami County Sheriff's Office

## **TESTIMONIAL #14**

Hello, My Name is Stanley Rock and I am a dispatcher with Beltrami County. I have worked here for 2 years, prior to working here I worked on a 911 ambulance service as an EMT for 7 years. In my time as an EMT I've pulled people from burning vehicles, I've done CPR on children, and I have comforted people in their last moments. All part of the job that we aren't allowed to talk about.

Through the covid pandemic I noticed that the "Essential employees" around the state of Minnesota were all of the people that are required to keep the system running smoothly, a good example of these positions is all of the first responders.

Of course without our field responders, the fires keep burning, the sick people die and the criminals are free to practice their craft. These fields represent a safety net for our society around the country. Years after turbulent calls I have community members thank me, random hugs from strangers. The conversations always go something like this.... "oh hey... You're, Stan right?!", "yeah, do I know you?" They spend the next couple minutes trying to get me to remember that fateful night and I do my best to remember. Obviously, for them this story represents a chapter of their life. It's a story they will tell their grandchildren, unfortunately for all of us first responders it was just the 5<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> call of the night 2 years ago.

When I moved to dispatch, I learned the definition of clerical staff: "Day-to-day office tasks, such as answering phones and entering data into spreadsheets. These tasks may be performed by secretaries, office clerks, and administrative assistants. Other duties traditionally associated with clerical work include: Word processing and typing."

I answer phones, I enter data into databases, I type in real time things like, "Please God Send Help I don't want my son to die" I allocate resources in emergencies, I am on the frontline of someone who may receive a subpoena to court stemming from emergencies. As I sit in my dispatch center surrounded by firefighters, police officers, EMT'S, corrections officers, I realize that we all share something in common, we are all First Responders. We use our skills to keep the community safe in real time.

I can't think of a secretary that may be required to deliver a baby over the phone as a regular job duty. Maybe I am a secretary, maybe I'm something more like a First Responder. As it turns out that's not my decision to make, it's yours.

Ultimately this decision directly affects my life, my retirement and my family. I have dedicated my life to helping people when they are in the worst possible situations. My body has suffered and for all of us who work in the emergency field we at some point come to the understanding that, we along with our families come last, because 911 waits for no one.

We are here making Minnesota a safer place in real time, Remember us, The secretaries with one at gunpoint. The ones that have our fingers directly on the pulses of our communities. Being a first responder who is coded as “clerical” certainly feels like a punishment. It only makes sense to vote for what you feel is right for Minnesotans.

“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” -Maya Angelou

Stanley E. Rock  
911 Dispatcher/Communications Officer  
Beltrami County Sheriff's Office

## TESTIMONIAL #15

Currently 911 Telecommunicators and Dispatchers in MN are designated as clerical. According to the Cambridge Dictionary clerical is defined as relating to work done in an office; a job performing general office duties (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/clerical>). General office duties include but are not limited to opening and closing files; making photocopies; opening or sending mail; sending cover letters; transmitting copies of documents to a client, sending faxes; picking up or delivering documents; drafting internal file memos; giving instructions to support staff; or billing.

In the 10 years that I have been with the Ramsey County Emergency Communications Center this has never been a definition of my job. Yes, we answer phones. Yes, we deal with the public. Yes, we work on a computer. This is where the comparisons end. People working clerical jobs typically work Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm, not the 12 to 16 hours shifts, 7 days a week, 365 days a year we work. People working clerical jobs typically have weekends and holidays off allowing them to celebrate with family and friends not missing family gatherings, birthdays, holidays, funerals, and weddings. People working clerical jobs do not deal with someone yelling that there are a group of 30-40 people fighting with weapons. People working clerical jobs do not listen to the cries of a wife begging for her husband to keep breathing after being shot in the chest. People working clerical jobs do not have people begging you to do something because they just want to die. People working clerical jobs do not deal with the public yelling and swearing at them, calling them names I would never think to say in general let alone to someone at a business. This is not a clerical job.

Working in the largest ECC in the state we take approximately a million calls a year. These calls range anywhere from barking dogs and parking complaints to someone being carjacked or a loved one in cardiac arrest. No matter the reason for the call, it is our job, as the FIRST first responder, to get help to those in our community that need it. We currently dispatch police, fire and Ems calls for over 19 agencies including the State Fair which attracts over 2 million people in its 10-day run.

I have seen many things change in the 10 years I've been with the ECC and a lot of them are not good. In our county we have seen increases in aggressive crime, drugs and overdoses, mental health issues, homelessness, and a negative change in the perception of those that work in public safety. On top of answering the phone I am required to be a social worker, counselor, mental health specialist, crisis negotiator, grief counselor and a medical professional helping to deliver a baby, give lifesaving CPR instructions or advising how to administer Narcan to someone dying of a drug overdose. While wearing these many hats I am also required to stay calm, have compassion and empathy, be patient, be responsible and serve my county. I am required to be trained and certified in multiple areas including EMD, CPR, security, and BCA training. I am required to take calls, dispatch units needed, monitor the events all while keeping track of my partners' events. There has also been a major increase in 911 repeat callers, misdials and hangups.

As a Fire / Medical Dispatcher, I will work 12-hour shifts on a 3-day and 4-day rotation on the overnight shift. In a typical 3-day rotation I personally will take over 60 calls including multiple cardiac arrests, overdoses, shootings, assaults, and mental health crises, as well as fire events including fire alarms, dwelling fires, and vehicle fires to say the least. There is no clerical job I know of that deals with the adrenaline roller coaster going from call to call of these types, with little to no breaks, working short handed due to staffing shortages, knowing you'll be mandated to stay for a 16-hour shift at least once in your rotation, lack of sleep, and no resolution to the calls you take. This is not a clerical job.

One of the biggest changes I've seen in the last 10 years is the public's perception of those that work in public safety. I worked the night of the riots in St Paul after the death of George Floyd. The hateful words that were said to myself and my partners hurt. Watching my city burn and the fear we held not knowing if our officers, medics, and fire personnel were going to be safe was crushing. Having the place I love to work surrounded by razor wire and the National Guard to protect us from the public we are paid to help. Since that time, we as 911 Telecommunicators and Dispatchers, are subjected daily to people that feel it is their right to yell and swear at us, call us names, threaten us, and then ask us to do our job and help them. And because we are committed to this job we chose, we help them, again and again. Regardless of how it makes us feel we continue to answer the call because this is what we do. This is not a clerical job.

All of this takes a toll on the 911 Telecommunicator and Dispatcher. We suffer from depression, PTSD, heart disease and even suicide. The dedication it takes to do this job breaks up families, causes long term stress, and a multitude of medical issues due to the lack of sleep, bad dietary habits, long hours of sitting, etc. This is not a clerical job.

There is one benefit, we have each other. We are a team. We are the FIRST of the first responders and we take care of our family (police, fire, and Ems). And we take care of each other. And whether we get our designation changed to first responder or not we will continue to do the job we love.

Thank you,  
Cindy Barnes  
Fire / Medical Dispatcher  
Ramsey County

## TESTIMONIAL #16

My story isn't about a 911 call, though there are plenty of them that I carry with me. I can remember with photographic memory many 911 calls. Calls from children or about children come to mind. There was a person who I couldn't tell their gender because of the guttural screaming that turned out to be a wife that woke up to a gunshot in the night and found her husband surrounded by the dark splatter of blood in the fresh snow of her back yard after having shot himself. There are calls that we all carry with us. They become part of our own baggage. No, my story is about my responders. I was dispatching on the radio when I lost two responders in the field. They tragically died while going about doing their job. It is a helpless feeling to know they need help, but you can't physically do anything about it. It was a loss I had a very difficult time processing and moving forward from. I quit my job without knowing if I could ever work again, let alone go back to dispatch, the career I love and chose to do. After about six months and two different jobs, I returned to my chosen profession. There were some very dark minutes, hours, weeks, months during that first year. With the love and support of my husband and a few friends that understood the job, I was able to push through to the other side. I survived it, but still have hours and days that are a struggle, even though it's been nearly five years. I have now been in this career for eighteen years and am fifty years old. The current job classification requires another seventeen years of me before retirement. I know I likely can't double my tenure and retire from this beloved job.

With new technology and NextGen911 developing, we are now able to see pictures and videos of the scene, in addition to hearing the call and sending help. Each 911 call we are exposed to has the potential of someone having the worst day of their life or worse. Multiply that by 10-20 high priority calls per shift. Multiply that shift by thousands in a career. Add the stress of being responsible for tracking and keeping our responders safe. We know what we signed on for coming into this job and doing it to help people. The job has a very low success rate for new people because it is difficult, both in skill and ability to healthily process the things we listen to every day. We work countless overtime and take nights, weekends and holidays away from our families. This is a choice we made by doing this consuming job.

I will have to put my mental health and family first at some point in the future. The problem is starting over in another profession at a much lower salary. Yes, it is doable, but very difficult. A change in job classification makes being able to retire from my chosen career a realistic option. I would most likely start over in a less stressful role to make ends meet and earn medical benefits at that stage in my life.

I am not alone in my experience. Not every dispatcher suffers from PTSD or crippling mental health issues, but every single 911 dispatcher is exposed to the darkest side of humanity every single shift. We are asking for the dignity of being classified in a job class that is more than "clerical" as we are more than that. We are the FIRST first responders and would like to be recognized as such.

Brenda Kupfer  
Anoka County Dispatch

## TESTIMONIAL #17

*May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016 changed my life, personally and professionally, forever.* I had only been a 911 Call Taker for approximately six months. First, I heard the loud echo of Shotspotter. Then a barrage of incoming emergency 911 calls. Someone had been shot. As quickly and efficiently as I could, I answered each call one after another. It would be moments later, when I found out that the *shooting victim was related to me.* As the victim's name was stamped into the call remarks, my supervisor made the connection by last name, confirmed with me that this was family, and escorted me off the floor. *I was an emotional wreck.*

My Great-Aunt had been driving down Penn Avenue in North Minneapolis when she got caught in the crossfire of two rival gang members. The bullet pierced her chest as she yelled "They got me" to her granddaughter sitting in the passenger seat. She was rushed to the hospital and into surgery right away.

The Training Manager and Assistant Director of Minneapolis Emergency Communications Center (MECC) at the time drove me from work and to the hospital, where I would meet many members of my family; including my uncle who was a Minneapolis Police Officer at the time. As my family gathered and prayed for my Great-Aunt, three Doctors made their way to the waiting area to meet my family. The lead Doctor began to speak, and the words moved slowly *"We did all we could. We opened her chest and worked on her, but she did not make it. I'm sorry."* The crying, yelling, and wailing was like nothing I had ever heard before.

This is just one story that highlights the dichotomy of being a 911 Dispatcher and being a resident of the same city. I was born and raised in Minneapolis. I have five generations of family and friends who also live in Minneapolis. Processing and dispatching 911 calls for the people who you love and care about is no easy task. Witnessing social unrest in response to an officer involved shooting and wondering if I am going to be safe at home in my city is terrifying. Wondering how I am going to get to work safely and keep myself safe in the middle of a pandemic is one of the most stressful things I have had to navigate in my life.

Thank you for allowing me to share my personal story with you. I have now been a 911 Dispatcher for 8.5 years and this work does not get easier. As 911 Dispatchers, *we are the first contact that a citizen makes* when calling for help during an emergency. We deserve to be classified as First Responders.

Sha'Daesha Beeks  
911 Dispatcher  
Minneapolis Emergency Communications Center (MECC)



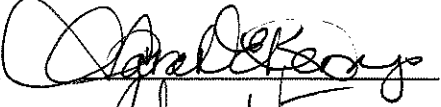
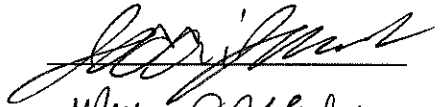
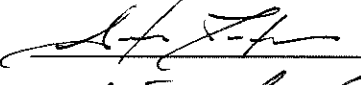
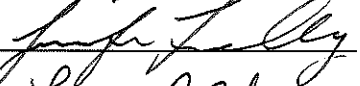
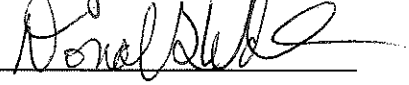
To whom it may concern:

We, the undersigned of the St. Louis County Sheriff's Office 911 Division, and also PERA members, are urging the Minnesota Legislature to support reclassification of our duties to first responder status and make certain our benefits are commensurate with that status.

As the "first" first responders in virtually all emergencies we are often just as impacted emotionally, physically, and mentally by the effects of secondary trauma and stress. Being remote from an incident does not dampen the terrified screams we hear. It does not reduce the post-traumatic stress reverberating weeks afterwards. Nor does it ease the outcome in which our decisions were central. We also understand that the physical effects of aging are going to prevent the more quick response times we had earlier in our careers. We've seen our partners struggle to keep up after 30 or 40 years of service. When seconds and accuracy count we want our communities to be safe above all else.

A change of our retirement benefits to PERA-Correctional functionally makes the most sense. There are Correctional Officer/Telecommunicator positions across the state, we collectively bargain and negotiate with Correctional Units, and in many jurisdictions the positions are considered equals - except for retirement benefits.

As some of the most essential employees, under the state's purview, we humbly ask that we are classified and treated with the same respect and equal consideration of benefits as those we serve alongside.

<u>Sarah Kemp</u>		<u>23 years</u>
<u>Adam Vih</u>	<u>Adam Vih</u>	<u>1.5 years</u>
<u>Jarid Johnson</u>		<u>1.5 years</u>
<u>McKenzie J.A. Taly</u>	<u>McKenzie Taly</u>	<u>1 years</u>
<u>Kayla DZUEK</u>	<u>Kayla DZUEK</u>	<u>1.5 years</u>
<u>Nancy MOSACK</u>	<u>Nancy Mosack</u>	<u>1.5 years</u>
<u>SETH JUSTICE</u>		<u>5 YEARS</u>
<u>Jennifer Lundberg</u>		<u>4.5 years</u>
<u>Laura Kukmanich</u>	<u>Laura Kukmanich</u>	<u>22 years</u>
<u>Joyce Hui</u>	<u>Joyce Hui</u>	<u>25 years</u>
<u>Donald Walters</u>		<u>27 years</u>

Katie Christensen  
Stephen EK  
Jacob D. MacKee  
Chae L Thompson  
Tammy Anderson  
Thomas Casick  
~~Barbara Moore~~  
Barbara Moore  
Amanda Vollmer  
Samantha Elmore  
Carmen Kimball  
~~to Gause~~  
Kaycee Carza  
~~Mya Barber~~  
Crystal Daugherty  
Christopher Bender  
Andrea Haberkunk  
Alexander Bodin  
Brunt Giesen  
Brian Thompson  
Christi Mueller  
Alicia Abernethy  
Krysten Solhast

Katie Christensen  
~~Stephen EK~~  
J  
C Thompson  
Tammy Anderson  
Tom Cas  
Mya Barber  
M  
C  
Samantha Elmore  
Carmen Kimball  
~~Kaycee Carza~~  
K  
C  
Crystal Daugherty  
Christopher Bender  
Andrea Haberkunk  
A  
B  
B  
B  
Christi M  
Alicia Abernethy  
Krysten Solhast

1 year  
5.5 years  
12.5 years  
3.5 years  
7.5 years  
22 years  
10 years  
19 years  
7 yrs  
8 Months  
18 years  
10 years  
16 years  
10 years  
5.5 years  
2 years  
8 Months  
16 years  
18 years  
18 years  
15 years  
3.5 years

**From:** [Anne and Gregg Felber](#)  
**To:** [Lisa Diesslin](#)  
**Subject:** Pension Commission Meeting Agenda for April 29, 2024 Testimony Item #5  
**Date:** Thursday, April 25, 2024 4:25:15 PM

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My name is Anne Felber, and I am a Probation Officer in the Intimate Partner Violence unit with Hennepin County. I am writing to provide testimony in support of unreduced retirement for probation and parole officers. I have been a PO for 32 years. I am married to a now retired Patrol Deputy. When our daughter was young and had to present to her kindergarten class what her parents did for a living she used to say, "my daddy catches the bad guys, and my mommy watches them." Now for a five-year-old, was a good explanation. Of course, she didn't realize at that point that most of our clients are people who have just made a bad decision. They're not all bad people.

Now we fast-forward 10-12 years later and at dinner one night she asked us what the worst case was that you guys ever dealt with". Her father and I looked at each other, trying to find the right words to not give out any information too descriptive or identifying, but also trying to honestly answer her question. Her father started to speak first and shared not quite the detail, but enough to satisfy her question. As he's telling the story. I remember my facial expression going still, and realizing the person that he was describing was also the scariest client I had ever worked with in my career. Now the incident my husband was describing actually happened six years prior to our child asking us that question at dinner. We realized that we had never spoken about it to each other because of how deep that trauma was, we didn't want to burden each other with that trauma. I tell the story only to highlight the fact that the trauma that police officers deal with which has been well recognized does get sent onto us as supervising agents when we work with the same clients. I am in no way comparing the risk that we as PO's take with that of police officers, but the emotional trauma is real for those in our field.

Many of you reading this will wake up tomorrow morning, open your emails or packets, start reading various types of financial summaries, amendments to bills, constituent emails etc. Most of the probation officers will open their emails to read about horrific crimes that have been committed by our clients that we need to respond to. We must react in a very neutral unemotional way to be sure we are fair and factual.

Every day when I get out of bed, I am reminded that I am rolling closer and closer to 60 years old. When I'm being asked to do home visits with nothing more than pepper spray and maybe a vest, I get more and more worried. I'm worried that these knees may not support me as I try to physically defend myself. I get worried that I might not be able to run fast enough to get away from what's happening. I feel the older I get; the chance is less of surviving an attack in the community.

I am hoping that the work that we, as PO's do to protect the victims and the community, by helping our clients receive the proper counseling and rehabilitative

services, is valued by this committee. I also hope that this committee recognizes that it does take an emotional and physical toll on the people who do that work.

I do love my job. I love seeing change in my clients, However, at this point in my life, I would need to work another 8 years, which would bring a total of 40 years of service to reach full retirement benefits. I ask you to please consider early unreduced retirement for Probation and Parole agents. I would love to see the benefit available to agents who have a combined service record of 32 years and have reached the age of at least 55 years old. I do not believe POs should be able to retire at an age younger than Police officers, however, I do believe after 32 years of service and over age 55, we should be able to retire with full pensions.

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Sincerely,

Anne Felber  
612-802-4106