



Office of the Sheriff

Commitment to Excellence



Dan Starry
County Sheriff

Douglas H. Anschutz
Chief Deputy

Darlene Pankonie

President, Minnesota APCO-NENA Chapter
Emergency Communications Response Center Manager
Washington County Sheriff's Office

March 23, 2026

Legislative Commission on Pensions and Retirement

Minnesota Legislature

RE: Support for LCPR26-012, LCPR26-013, and LCPR26-017

Mr. Chair and Members of the Commission:

My name is Darlene Pankonie. I serve as President of the Minnesota APCO-NENAⁱ Chapter and as the Emergency Communications Response Center Manager for Washington County.

I am writing in support of LCPR26-012, LCPR26-013, and LCPR26-017. Thank you for hearing this important legislation and for your continued commitment to addressing long-standing inequities within our public safety system.

I would like to recognize several members of this Commission:

Senator Pappas, for your decades of leadership and early support of this work—congratulations on your upcoming retirement; Senator Seeberger, for your continued support and for representing portions of Washington County; Representative Wolgamott, for your advocacy on behalf of public safety telecommunicators; and Representative Cha, as my home representative, I appreciate your service and support.

I have dedicated 32 years to the 9-1-1 profession and have been advocating for enhanced pension recognition for public safety telecommunicators for many years. I had the honor of serving as Chair of the 2021–2022 LCPR Working Group on this issue and most recently participated in the work group that developed this legislation and accompanying report.

These proposed bills are the result of thoughtful, collaborative work—bringing together retirement systems, state agencies, labor, public safety professional associations, and local governments—to find a balanced and responsible path forward.

Public safety telecommunicators are the first, first responders. Every day, they manage high-stress, high-stakes situations—guiding callers through life-threatening emergencies and coordinating response across multiple disciplines. And yet, despite the nature of the work, telecommunicators have remained in general employee pension plans.

These bills recognize the reality of the profession. They create a path forward that better aligns benefits with the demands of the job—while remaining responsible in both structure and funding.

I want to acknowledge an important perspective: these changes do not significantly benefit someone like me with over three decades of service. However, they also do no harm. And that is the point.

We cannot focus on what this does not change for the past. We must focus on what it secures for the future. If we are serious about recruitment, retention, and the long-term sustainability of the 9-1-1 workforce, we must ensure the benefits reflect the realities of the work. This profession is evolving—becoming more complex, more demanding, and more critical to public safety outcomes. It takes years to develop into an effective public safety telecommunicator. Without action, we risk losing the workforce our communities depend on.

These bills are about equity.
They are about recognition.
And they are about the future of this profession.

On behalf of the Minnesota APCO-NENA Chapter, I respectfully ask for your support.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Darlene Pankonie, ENP | Emergency Communications Response Center Manager
Washington County Sheriff's Office
15015 62nd Street North, Stillwater, MN 55082
Phone: 612-384-4172 | Cell 612-384-4172

MN APCO-NENA | President



ⁱ APCO – Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials; NENA – National Emergency Number Association