



Massachusetts Communications Supervisors Association

“Developing Dispatchers & Dispatch Centers”

Board@ma911.org

Christopher Campbell
Seekonk Communications
President
president@ma911.org

Donald Hancock
Billerica PD
Vice-President

Ed Merriam
Berkshire County SD
Secretary

Paula Snow
Cambridge ECC
Treasurer

Warren Gould
Boxford Communications
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Gardner PD
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Erin Hastings MSP
Western Regional VP

Stephen Hooke
911 Commission Representative

Good Afternoon honorable senators and representatives of the great Commonwealth. Thank you for the opportunity to come and speak before you today. My name is Christopher Campbell and I have been involved in the field of emergency communications for over 18 years as an emergency telecommunicator and emergency telecommunications supervisor for the towns of Norton and Mansfield and Seekonk. I am also the president of the Massachusetts Communications Supervisors Association.

I am here today to speak in favor of Senate Bill 1442 offered by Sen. Timilty and House Bill 2415 offered by Rep Smola. There are currently over 5000 certified dispatchers who serve the citizens of the commonwealth in public safety answering points or PSAPS throughout the state. This includes local municipalities, regional communications facilities and state police dispatchers. Some of these dispatchers are sworn police officers or fire fighters who fall under group 4 retirement benefits however the predominance are non sworn civilian personnel who are classified in Group 1. There are some whose local or county retirement boards have rightfully classified them into Group 2 as is the case in Andover, Boston Fire Alarm, Barnstable County and interestingly enough the dispatchers only and not their supervisors in the city of Cambridge. I site Cambridge as an interesting example because unlike Police Officers or Fire Fighters who receive promotions to a higher rank and stay within the same retirement group, Dispatchers who have received promotions to supervisors have had their retirement benefits decreased as a result.

The current language for Group 2 calls for “Police and Fire Alarm signal operators and signal repairmen” to be classified as group 2 members. This language is rather archaic and as such has proven difficult for various retirement boards to interoperate with what a modern day dispatcher, emergency telecommunicator, 9-1-1 operator or Police and Fire Alarm signal operator actually does. Just like technology has changed since this law was enacted in the late 1960’s the titles for these jobs has changed to reflect the modern working environment. I would call upon you the members of this committee to bring the retirement benefits up to date as well.

The duties of a modern day dispatcher have evolved greatly over the last four decades and while dispatchers still monitor hard wired fire and police alarm circuits over a copper wire communications network they also now monitor those same alarm signals via radio signal systems, monitor emergency radio communications equipment with the capabilities of receiving emergency signals from individual public safety personnel as well as emergency radio traffic. Dispatchers operate complex criminal justice information computer systems, mobile data exchange terminals, computer aided dispatch systems and fire station alerting equipment. They also handle both wireline and wireless 9-1-1 calls and communicate with individuals who may only be able to communicate via TTY equipment due to various disabilities. 9-1-1 Operators Communicate with people who are unable to speak due to emergencies where the simple act of verbally giving a name, address or reason for the call would place the



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caller's life in danger. In the near future with the implementation of Next generation 911 dispatchers will be taking information via text and ultimately live video feed. Dispatchers monitor multiple public safety radio systems and toning equipment which provides the ability to summon or respond to mutual aid requests from other communities within the Commonwealth and beyond our borders into neighboring states such as Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Vermont.

Dispatchers today are the "First" first responders.... they are seldom seen and often forgotten but they play a critical role in the Public Safety System. Without a trained dispatcher to provide life saving instructions in CPR an infant may die in the arms of their mother or a child may not know how to assist a parent who is unresponsive from a diabetic emergency. Think of the expectant father who must rely on the emergency medical instructions given by a dispatcher or dispatcher supervisor on how to deliver their new child into the world on the side of a remote highway while waiting for an ambulance to arrive. While Police Officers and Fire Fighters run into flames and dodge bullets Dispatchers are providing them critical time sensitive information from the callers who are on scene. We often speak of the stress that Police Officers and Fire Fighter work under on a daily basis. While those facts are true, I would expand those arguments

to include that fact that not only are the dispatchers dealing with the victims and responding officers to those incidents they are also simultaneously dealing with multiple other victims and first responders for other incidents in the same community. They have only a split second to make life saving decisions and find needed resources so callers who depend on the dispatchers to get them help receive that assistance. We know the effects that Post Traumatic Stress has on Police Officers and Fire Fighters, what we also need to consider are those same effects on the dispatchers who take the calls. Dispatchers hear some of the most soul searing sounds you can possibly imagine, whether it is the anguished wails of a gunshot victim, the final words of a suicidal caller they can not deter from ending their life or the final thoughts of a colleague who is trapped in a dark basement of a burning brownstone on a city street. The effects of these incidents over time lead to fatigue, burn out and sometimes far worse.

The dispatchers and communications supervisors of the Commonwealth play a critical role in all major public safety events that occur within our borders. From providing critical emergency medical instructions prior to EMS arrival, to having the incredible knowledge and forward thinking to be able to track and relay to multiple law enforcement agencies location information of a terrorist via a car jacked vehicles telematics information system. The dispatchers and communications supervisors who serve within the Commonwealth should be given equal opportunity under the state retirement system to receive the benefits of Group 2 retirement as was intended by the original passing of the law.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this important matter.



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