

## Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 128

Chair Dembrow and Members of the Senate Workforce Committee:

I respectfully request your support of Senate Bill 128. As a police dispatcher of almost nine years, I have heard a great deal. I welcome you to imagine for a moment just a few of the calls for service that the Oregon State Police Telecommunicators dispatch: A motor vehicle crash with blockage of the highway and injuries to the occupants, a backup request on a robbery in progress, an unknown risk traffic stop, an attempt to locate for a missing child, a barricaded subject, a request for a criminal detective for a rape case by an understaffed sheriff or police department. Now, stop and think how you would feel if these were all happening at the same time, and even compounded by happening to the same dispatcher. It's the reality for State Police dispatchers every day.

OSP Telecommunicators dispatch 37 patrol offices, covering all 36 counties in the state. An individual dispatcher may have anywhere from three to eight of these counties at a time. The monitoring of multiple counties is a large challenge, even without the stressful types of calls for service because troopers in one county cannot hear a trooper speaking in another county. Keep in mind, there is yet another layer of complexity within each county. OSP has multiple radio frequencies/channels and the troopers often cannot hear their co-worker within the same county. The dispatcher keeping the overlapping voices and information defined is key to officer safety.

It is more common than not for two or even three troopers, each on different county radios, to be initiating a traffic stop or public contact at the same time. It takes highly skilled dispatchers to use what the industry calls "dispatcher ear" to do this simultaneously. This is when a dispatcher will selectively tune in to verbal information coming into their headset (one ear) collecting the vitally important information of location of a traffic contact, then switch to their "free" ear to capture the outbound speaker and collect the location of the second trooper initiating a traffic contact. The dispatcher will again quickly switch focus to one ear to record and run the vehicle plate to make sure it is not a stolen and then again, back to the second trooper's information with the "free" ear for the second vehicles plate information.

Telecommunicators are often the first contact with the public via the telephone. OSP is not a 911, but this does not mitigate the nature of the calls. The OSP dispatch centers receive life threatening, time sensitive calls for service repeatedly. In many ways OSP dispatchers have a tougher job. I personally have watched successful 911 dispatchers fail OSP's training program because of the inability to handle the challenges of multiple counties at once. It is a highly skilled profession where a simple mistake can be costly. Having the right personnel is imperative and indispensable. OSP cannot afford to lose another talented dispatcher to another agency. I am explaining this to the committee to underscore the complexity of the job, and why it is crucial that Oregon State find a fair and competitive wage for OSP Telecommunicators.

Telecommunicators at the Oregon State Police are approximately 26% under the average Oregon wage for a 911 dispatcher. This has posed a problem with attraction, as well as retention of qualified workers. This pay parity bill passing is crucial to maintain OSP's vision as the Premier Public Safety Services for Oregon.

Respectfully,

Heather Whitaker  
Oregon State Police Officers Association