

Submitter: Ashley Ringheim

On Behalf
Of:

Committee: House Committee On Emergency Management, General
Government, and Veterans

Measure: HB2701

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Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 2701

Ashley Ringheim

Clackamas County Communications

My name is Ashley Ringheim and I'm testifying in favor of House Bill 2701. I have worked as a 911 telecommunicator for almost 14 years.

As I've navigated this challenging, exciting, stressful, heart-breaking, multifaceted career I have went home many days feeling defeated and broken down but I've never regretted my choice to serve my community. One thing I do regret is the lack of knowledge and recognition of the trauma and risks associated with my career. Most people are quick to acknowledge the danger of being a law enforcement officer or firefighter but haven't stopped to think about the risk, trauma and liability that telecommunicators face. Working as a 911 professional requires a high level of resilience, multi-tasking and quick-thinking. Telecommunicator are a critical piece of the public safety network and are the first point of contact for citizens when they call 911. Many studies have come out on the effects of trauma on first responders- including dispatchers and its being found that dispatchers can suffer from "vicarious trauma. "Vicarious trauma is bearing witness to other's pain and suffering" [Emergency Dispatchers and Vicarious Trauma: It's Real and It Matters. <http://www.https://www.mresilience.net/insights/emergency-dispatchers-and-vicarious-trauma-its-real-and-it-matters>] and this is what 911 dispatchers do every day. The trauma we experience on a regular basis can bring on a host of physical and mental ailments including loss of sleep, high blood pressure, depression, anxiety and many more.

Although telecommunicators don't physically respond to the scene of an incident we live through each call with our police and fire partners. We may not see the tragedies with our eyes but we hear them through the phone and radio. 911 dispatchers have been called the "first" first responders and it's so true. My ears are the first to hear the distress and some things can't be unheard. I'm going to list for you a few of the sounds that replay in my brain and will never be erased.

-The sound of water splashing and a mother screaming "HELP US" as her husband pulls their unconscious two year out of a backyard pool.

-The gasping snores that are undeniably agonal breathing from an elderly male in cardiac arrest and the crying, scared voice of his wife trying to follow my CPR instructions.

-The shell shocked voice of a fire fighter advising the small child who was ran over by a tractor is deceased.

-The desperate, heartbreaking wails of a mother who just discovered her 21 year old son overdosed on heroin.

-The sound of wrestling and my deputy frantically yelling for more units to help him as the suspect is fighting him and trying to grab his gun.

I have hundreds of examples like these, as do all my fellow telecommunicators. We keep showing up day after day, answering the calls and radio, never knowing what waits on the other side. We stay calm in the midst of chaos. Our every day normal is dealing with other peoples once in a lifetime worst moment. We are first responders. On behalf of myself and all the amazing 911 telecommunicates in the State of Oregon I ask for your support of HB2701. Thank you for your time.