



# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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*Testimony of Rep. Stephan Bunker introducing*

## **LD 2085, An Act to Modify Service Retirement Provisions to Include Additional Emergency Communications Positions in the 1998 Special Plan**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor*

Good afternoon, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and members of the Labor Committee. I am Stephan Bunker and I represent House District 75, which includes the communities of Farmington and Chesterville. I'm here today to introduce **LD 2085, An Act to Modify Service Retirement Provisions to Include Additional Emergency Communications Positions in the 1998 Special Plan**.

In 1995, I was selected as Maine's first 911 Bureau Director and challenged with implementing the universal three-digit dial system. The steps included community addressing, coordinating with the many independent telcos, Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and selecting modern call taking technology for the 911 centers. I then quickly realized the important, but underappreciated, role that dispatchers play in the system.

I am proud to say that I was able to implement Maine's first training and certification standards for dispatchers and developed a modern training lab at the police academy in Vassalboro, delivering a basic training curriculum to new hires. I later implemented the training standards for emergency medical dispatch, which gave dispatchers the skills to offer pre-arrival, life saving coaching to callers while the ambulance was in route. Maine was the first to implement the standard statewide.

More recently, Maine added emergency fire dispatching standards to train dispatchers on how to better handle fire and rescue calls, this again is also a statewide standard.

Where once, dispatchers were considered little more than glorified office workers, they are now becoming seen as true professionals and identified as the "FIRST" first responders alongside our police, fire and ambulance personnel.

Dispatchers are now considering this work as a career. However, given the tremendous pressures that come with the work, it is a constant struggle to recruit and retain these essential workers. I feel that it is most important that we recognize their work with appropriate salary and benefits,

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such as this special retirement plan. They will join their colleagues in firefighting, law enforcement and corrections in receiving this benefit.

Adding this benefit would be a great step forward to recognizing this critical position and help to address the constant recruitment efforts at our dispatch centers.

I hope the committee will approve this legislation.