



Testimony of
Michael J. Crouse, President
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**LD 467 An Act to Support E-9-1-1 Dispatchers & Corrections Officers Diagnosed with
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

March 1st, 2021

Chairman Rafferty & Sylvester and distinguished members of Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing Good Morning and thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee today in support of LD 467, An Act to Support Dispatchers & Corrections Officers with PTSD.

My name is Michael Crouse and I am the President of the Professional Fire Fighters of Maine and a resident of Kittery. I am here today representing the views of 1,000 Professional Firefighters, Paramedics, EMTs & Dispatchers.

The women and men of our organization are on the front lines everyday protecting and serving the citizens, businesses, and tourists in 40 of our cities and towns throughout the great State of Maine. They are not just firefighters, EMTs, Paramedics or Law Enforcement Officers. They include the true 1st Responders, our 9/11 Dispatchers and/or Communication Operators that no ones ever sees and/or talks about.

Mr. Chairmen, as you know, LD 467 if enacted, would make PTSD a rebuttable presumption for our 9/11 Dispatchers and Correction Officers.

This morning I would like to share with you and the members of the Committee a few facts that will be helpful as you consider this important piece of legislation.

- When our citizens are in distress and need public safety assistance they call 9/11.
- The emergency situations that our 9/11 dispatchers encounter include, but are not limited to homicides, suicides, domestic violence, child-involved critical incidents, car crashes, structure fires: for most people, it's the stuff of nightmares. For our 911 emergency dispatchers, it's all in a day's work.
- It's our dispatchers that inner act with eh callers and deploy the proper emergency resources to the location of the incident, while at the same time assisting the caller over the phone until help arrives.
- Callers are often experiencing an emotional crisis and are hysterical. Dispatchers are under enormous pressure to control their own emotions while extracting the pertinent information, securing the emergency scene, and communicating with multiple agencies – sometimes during life-and-death situations.
- Afterward, there's little time for the dispatcher to process what happened the Dispatcher has to press on and get right back to work and the next call.
- The data shows that dispatchers experience high levels of “peritraumatic distress,” the strong emotions felt during a traumatic event. These dispatchers have reported experiencing fear, helplessness, or horror in reaction to nearly one-third of the different types of potentially traumatic calls.
- Being a 911 dispatcher is considered a stressful profession. However, the data from various studies indicates the events typically handled by these first responders are also traumatic, and there can result in adverse mental health effects.
- Studies have also found that dispatchers report significant emotional distress related to handling duty-related calls, and this type of distress is associated with increased risk for developing PTSD or PTSD symptoms.

- If LD 467 is enacted into law, it would “NOT” provide an automatic coverage for PTSD for our dispatcher’s cancers. It is important to note that even if a dispatcher is diagnosed with PTSD and files a Report of Injury for the presumption, it is a rebuttable presumption. Which means the dispatcher does not “automatically” get the claim approved, but instead the presumption places the burden of proof on the Employer to prove that the PTSD was not caused by the Dispatchers job.

Mr. Chairman, these are the facts and they are undisputable and hopefully will be helpful as you and the Committee continue your work on LD 467.

Many States have already include dispatchers in their PTSD Presumptive statutes and is finally becoming accepted throughout the Country. It is time that Maine joins these other States and enacts legislation to help and support our 9/11 Dispatchers who are diagnosed with work related PTSD.

Please consider this Bill to add 9/11 Dispatchers to the same PTSD Presumptive Coverage that other 1st responders currently enjoy. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully Submitted on this day, Monday, March 1st, 2021

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See attached