

March 1, 2021

LD 467 - An Act To Support E-9-1-1 Dispatchers and Corrections Officers Diagnosed with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

As a 911 Emergency Dispatcher, I handle many types of stressors on a daily basis. Calls that many people in the general public will never experience in their lifetime. Radio traffic from Police Officers and Firefighters that no one should ever have to hear. Dispatchers are the first responders that no one sees. We are here 24/7 answering business calls, 911 calls, and Police, Fire and EMS radio traffic. When people hear of a major incident, whether it be a fire, fatal car accident, robbery, child involved critical incident, etc., they don't generally take into consideration the dispatcher that took those calls. The first person to hear those cries for help, the person to alert the Police Officers or Fire Department personnel, and the person that provides lifesaving instructions until help arrives. The unique thing about Dispatchers is that we paint the picture in our minds. We visualize what we think a scene or incident would look like. Sometimes that can be a scary thing. Most of the time we are left without closure, there is no final outcome for us. It doesn't stop there. Dispatchers have to be ready to take the next call. There is no break in between, no down time to process one incident before you take on another. In my twelve years on the job, I've answered the calls of children and spouses not breathing, a teenager that hung himself, domestic violence, drug overdoses, cries of children, callers wanting to harm themselves, building fires, officers calling "shots fired", "Mayday", the list goes on. And it will continue to go on, every day I answer a phone or radio traffic. Most people will say I signed up for this job. They are right, I did sign up for this job. But that doesn't mean I'm invincible. None of us are. Dispatchers join the force to help people. As cliché as that may sound to some, it's true. We want to make a difference in our community, the lives of the people around us, and to help keep safe our brothers and sisters working the road in a police or fire uniform. The voice and ears that watch over them. We don't do this job to always have a pat on the back, and we are used to being the "responder in the background." And that's ok. But what dispatchers do deserve, is a chance to be recognized with the rest of the public safety world. Recognized as individuals that do have exposure to trauma, critical incident stressors, and carry a high level of stressful responsibility. Dispatchers tend to wonder how their performance affected an outcome. Were my CPR instructions effective enough? Was my voice calming and in control? Did I hide my own emotions? I'm only human. That's what people need to realize. Dispatchers are only human. We do the job, and at the end of the day, your gratification comes from knowing that you made a difference. For some dispatchers though, that comes with a price. A price that could come in the form of mental health issues. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder doesn't always stem from just one or two bad calls. It could be a compilation of the daily calls that span over your career. It's time that people realize how the severity of the job of an Emergency 911 dispatcher can completely affect one's life.

Now, I ask that the Labor and Housing committee recognize dispatchers as first responders and to support and pass the LD 467. To include PTSD as a presumptive illness covered under workers comp, along with firefighters and law enforcement officers. Thank you.

Respectfully,
Darcy L. Valido