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To whom it may concern,

I have been a 9-1-1 dispatcher for 9 years. In those years, I have dealt with every kind of call you could think of: medical emergencies, fires, stabbings, robberies, shootings, officers in danger, homicides, protests, child codes, and anything in between.

However, the most stressful aspect of my career has been the impact of critically short staffing in my center. It is my job to handle every situation that comes through the phone or the radio, but it becomes increasingly difficult when the work load of missing team members is added to my shoulders.

In the past 2 years I've seen "minimum staffing standards" disappear, and obscenely dangerous work conditions become acceptable. When there aren't enough people to staff 9-1-1 centers, calls go unanswered. People who need help reach no one. Officers and fire fighters find themselves in danger with no one able to hear their radio traffic when they end up in a fight, or when the phone lines are so overwhelmed that we can properly process that call to obtain scene safety information.

Add on top of that the increase in forced over time work hours and lack of sleep. In the past 1.5 years my coworkers and I average 64 work hours in 4 days. For those of you who can do the math, that is 16 hour shifts with 8 hour turn arounds. Imagine working 16 hours straight, having a 30-40 minute drive home, spending half an hour getting ready for bed and handling any house things that need to be done (pets, dishes, laundry, etc), another hour trying to fall asleep, 4 hours of sleeping, 2 hours to shower and commute back to work for 16 hours.

Can you function daily on 4 hours of sleep? Can you drive safely, can you make quick, life saving or like taking decisions?

That is what your 9-1-1 dispatchers have to do every day. How do you convince a new person to sign on to that kind of life? And I don't even know how people's with families or kids can put up with it.

I can also think of one specific example of when a call went unanswered because we just didn't have the people to answer: a neighbor in an apartment building was actively stabbing 2 people. There were 4 of us working when 5 people called 9-1-1 as they watched 2 people get stabbed. 4 people got to hear "9-1-1 what's the address of the emergency" and they knew someone was coming, and their cry for help was being heard. 1 caller never had that reassurance. In a room with 4 people, maybe 3 can answer the phone, but 1 person needs to radio the officers to neutralize the threat (and the victim isn't getting an ambulance started right away, sorry but they're still on a 9-1-1 line). So one scared caller has no idea help is coming.

That is what the citizens face every day there are staffing shortages in 9-1-1 centers. This is one example of the hundreds that have occurred in the last 2 years.

You are in danger, the police officers and fire fighters are in danger.

Until the staffing crisis can be solved, my advice stay the same: don't call 9-1-1, there's no one left to answer.