

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 1419
House Government & Veterans Affairs
January 30, 2025

Shannon LaHaise, Director of Public Safety Answering Point
City of Grand Forks, ND

Chair Schauer and members of the committee. My name is Shannon LaHaise, and I am the Director for the Grand Forks Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP); a 911 professional for over 28 years, dedicated to delivering critical emergency services to our community. I am writing in support of HB 1419 to highlight the importance of this inclusion and recognition of 911 Dispatchers as first responders—a designation that accurately reflects their critical role in the public safety ecosystem.

By including 911 Dispatchers, or Public Safety Telecommunicators as defined in Century Code 57-40.6-01, in the Public Safety Retirement Plan, it would formally recognize their integral role in emergency response and align their benefits with those of other first responders. Like Police Officers, Firefighters, and Emergency Medical Personnel, Dispatchers dedicate their careers to protecting the public. Their role is integral to the safety and well-being of our communities.

911 Dispatchers, or Public Safety Telecommunicators, are the true first responders. They are the initial point of contact in emergencies, often delivering life-saving guidance and communications long before Police, Firefighters, or Paramedics arrive on the scene. Our dedicated professionals manage high-pressure situations, providing critical instructions to callers, coordinating with multiple agencies, and ensuring that first responders in the field have the information they need to act swiftly and effectively.

Public Safety Telecommunicators are held to the same security clearances and standards as our partner agencies, and the training required to become a 911 dispatcher is rigorous. It involves mastering complex communication systems, understanding emergency protocols, and learning to manage a wide array of crises—from natural disasters to criminal incidents. Dispatchers must be able to assess situations quickly, multitask under extreme pressure, and make split-second decisions that can mean the difference between life and death.

Inclusion in the public safety retirement plan is a vital step toward acknowledging the unique skill set, and the lives they save every day. It would not only enhance recruitment and retention but also affirm their role as indispensable members of the public safety community.

I urge this committee to support a DO PASS on HB 1419, recognizing Public Safety Telecommunicators to receive the recognition and benefits they have earned through their service.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to addressing this issue. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Sincerely,
Shannon LaHaise
Grand Forks PSAP, Director