

March 14, 2025

Dear Chairperson Roers and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today in support of Senate Bill 2296. My name is Cole M. Brunner, Shift Supervisor for Red River Regional Dispatch Center in Fargo and President of the North Dakota Chapter of Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO). I started my career in the emergency communications industry in 2014 as a Public Safety Telecommunicator and working my way up to a Shift Supervisor. My testimony today is on my behalf only and not that of my positions with my affiliated organizations.

Public Safety Telecommunicators (PSTs) play a vital role in emergency response for our communities. These individuals are the “first” first responders during emergencies by being the essential link between those needing emergency services and those critical life-saving resources. The responsibility of a PST goes beyond that of simply answering the phone and clerical type duties. These individuals are the first point of contact to collect important information to assess situations, provide life-saving pre-arrival medical instructions, and make split-second life or death decisions while building trust and rapport with citizens and responders.

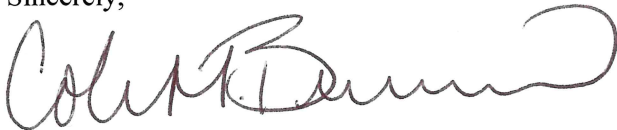
The work of a PST requires extensive hours of training, continuing education, and dedication that are equal to those that work the field such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, and paramedics. By recognizing PSTs as first responders, it will honor their commitment and dedication while strengthening the importance of their work for generations to come.

As a PST, I have experienced many rewarding opportunities but have also experienced countless occasions of emotional and mental distress. Some believe that because we don’t respond to the scene of a call, we have no reason to experience stress or psychological trauma such as PTSD. In fact, it is the complete opposite. We are most often left without knowing the outcome of a call, resulting in our brains constantly replaying our own unsettling imagery of the situation. This, combined with working long rotating shifts, mandated overtime due to below staffing levels, missed family holidays and events, and sacrificed personal well-being build up and take a toll.

In this field, no one fights alone, regardless of what side of the radio you work on. We have shared experiences and shared challenges. Please help to break down that barrier that separates PSTs from being recognized as First Responders. This divide has existed for too long and I ask you to please vote in favor of SB 2296 so that we may be recognized for our service. This would ensure myself and my fellow PSTs across the State of North Dakota to have access to the same training, resources, support, and acknowledgement. I am proud to write to you today in support of SB 2296 and ask that you vote in support of it.

Thank you for your time and consideration in recognizing this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cole M. Brunner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping loop at the end.

Cole M. Brunner