

January 28, 2025

Dear Chairperson Roers and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of Senate Bill 2296. My name is Sarah Miller, Public Safety Telecommunications Director and 911 Coordinator for Barnes County Dispatch and President of the North Dakota 911 Association. I have been serving this industry for 15 years in various roles such as Public Safety Telecommunicator, Public Safety Telecommunications Supervisor, Reserve Deputy, and Emergency Medical Technician. The testimony I am providing you with today is testimony on behalf of myself only and not the official positions of any organization I am affiliated with.

It is with great excitement I am here today in support of Senate Bill 2296 - defining the men and women who answer 911 calls, dispatch emergency responders, and coordinate life-saving efforts – as First Responders. Public Safety Telecommunicators are the first link in the vital chain of emergency services provided to the public. They are the “first” first responders and first point of contact in an emergency. Their expertise, quick thinking, and ability to make split-second decisions under pressure literally means the difference between someone living and someone dying.

This work requires Telecommunicators to work under intense pressure, often handling multiple emergencies simultaneously. Whether its dispatching law enforcement, fire, EMS, or other entities, their actions are immediate and directly contribute to the outcome of the emergency. They make life saving decisions, provide critical instructions to callers (such as CPR Guidance), and provide coordination in complex situations, keeping responding agencies updated with real-time information. This support ensures that responders arrive on-scene prepared, with necessary resources, and most importantly, safely.

Public Safety Telecommunicators also experience the same emotional and mental strain as first responders in the field. They are exposed to distressing and traumatic calls, yet must remain calm, focused, and professional in order to provide critical assistance to their caller. Their work can be just as hazardous to their mental health and recognizing Public Safety Telecommunicators as first responders will ensure access to the same support, training, and resources that are needed to continue a high level of service to their communities. It also publicly recognizes their true value and essential role in ensuring a safe community and state.

While in support of the deserved recognition I also am requesting an amendment to Section 2. As currently proposed, Section 2's addition of “and First Responders” would allow the department of health and human services to regulate communications methods and protocols for ALL first responders. This regulation is already addressed in existing sections of Century Code, providing extensive and comprehensive guidelines ensuring effective communications between responder groups. This amendment is a broad statement that could have unintentional regulatory consequences.

By defining the role of a First Responder, and recognizing Public Safety Telecommunicators in that role, we are acknowledging the true reality of their work. We recognize the responsibility, the expertise, and the immense pressure they shoulder each day as they leave their families, sign into their consoles, and take that first call each shift. These dedicated individuals are indispensable to public safety, and they deserve to be recognized as equal partners in being a First Responder. By eliminating repetitive provisions, such as the amendment in Section 2, we ensure our emergency response system remains well organized and concentrated on saving lives.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and recognition of this important issue. I am happy to answer any questions you have.

Sincerely,



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SENATE BILL NO. 2296

Introduced by

Senators Walen, Luick, Enget

Representatives Fegley, Vigesaa

1 A BILL for an Act to amend and reenact sections 23-27-02 and 23-27-04.8 of the North Dakota
2 Century Code, relating to first responders.

3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF NORTH DAKOTA:

4 **SECTION 1. AMENDMENT.** Section 23-27-02 of the North Dakota Century Code is
5 amended and reenacted as follows:

6 23-27-02. Definitions.

7 For the purpose of this chapter, unless the context otherwise requires:

- 8 1. "Department" means the department of health and human services.
- 9 2. "Emergency medical services" means the prehospital medical stabilization or
10 transportation, including interfacility transportation, of an individual who is sick, injured,
11 wounded, or otherwise incapacitated or helpless, or in a real or perceived acute
12 medical condition, by a person that holds oneself out to the public as being in that
13 service or that regularly provides that service. The term includes:
 - 14 a. Assessing, stabilizing, and treating life-threatening and non-life-threatening
15 medical conditions; or
 - 16 b. Transporting a patient who is in a real or perceived acute medical condition to a
17 hospital emergency room or other appropriate medical destination.
- 18 3. "Emergency medical services operation" means an entity licensed to offer and provide
19 emergency medical services by emergency medical services personnel with physician
20 oversight. The term includes basic life support ambulance services, advanced life
21 support ambulance services, air ambulance services, and quick response unit
22 services.
- 23 4. "Emergency medical services personnel" means individuals who provide emergency
24 medical services for emergency medical services operations. The term includes

1 emergency medical services professionals, drivers, and department-certified
2 emergency medical services providers, such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation drivers
3 and first responders.

4 5. "Emergency medical services professional" means an individual licensed by the
5 department under this chapter.

6 6. "First responder" means an individual trained to provide assistance during an
7 emergency, including a firefighter as defined under section 18-11-03, law enforcement
8 officer as defined under section 12.1-01-04, public safety telecommunicator as defined
9 under section 57-40.6-01, and emergency medical services personnel.

10 **SECTION 2. AMENDMENT.** Section 23-27-04.8 of the North Dakota Century Code is
11 amended and reenacted as follows:

12 **23-27-04.8. Emergency medical services operation communications.**

13 The department may regulate the communications methods and protocols for emergency
14 medical services operations and first responders in a manner consistent with the protocols
15 established by the department of emergency services.