

Testimony by Chief Krah Plunkert of the Fruitland Police Department

I want to express my most sincere support for SB 700. Our communications personnel (911 dispatchers) provide an absolutely invaluable service to police, fire, and EMS personnel as well as our communities. Our 911 dispatchers and communications specialists save lives on a regular basis and rarely are recognized for doing so. Dispatchers receive frantic calls for help and calmly translate that into a call for service. They provide lifesaving guidance such as CPR instructions, calming suicidal persons and even convincing armed suspects to disarm prior to police arrival. They simultaneously answer 911 calls, determine nature and classification for the incident, dispatch the call for service to the law enforcement officer, and maintain communication with the caller while remaining focused on the law enforcement officers response and safety. Our dispatchers are a lifeline to the public and our first responders. Having been in law enforcement for over 35 years, I can recall countless times that the radio dispatcher has significantly reduced the chances of an officer being injured or killed in the line of duty. The common saying within law enforcement is the “dispatcher will always have my six”.

One of the most overlooked topics in the first responder community is the contributions of our dispatchers. They are seldom paid what they are worth, and they are generally not eligible for a comparable retirement. It needs to be acknowledged that our dispatchers experience many of the same stressors **that we as Law Enforcement** officers experience. They too experience the rapid pulse, increased blood pressure, anxiety, sleep pattern disruptions caused by rotating shifts, and lost family time during holidays. When people’s lives are on the line, or an officer fails to answer their radio or they’re in a life-threatening situation, our dispatchers feel the same responses as those personnel on the scene.

SB 700 goes a long way in recognizing the contributions of our dispatchers **which will** create an eligible career path with a **sustainable** retirement, rather than just a job. This bill models the same bill unanimously passed into law to allow the Salisbury Fire Department to participate in LEOPS (SB 504 of 2004) **and** the bill unanimously passed into law **just last year** to allow emergency medical technicians to participate in LEOPS (SB 368 of 2023). The passage of this bill will enhance the ability to recruit and retain qualified members of our law enforcement community. The increased quality and longevity of our dispatchers will greatly impact the quality of service to the Citizens of Maryland. Please support SB700. Thank you.