

SB374 – Workers Compensation PTSD  
Position: FAVORABLE

My name is Bardona Woods. I began working as a 9-1-1 Specialist at Washington County, Maryland's 9-1-1 center in September 1983. While working in this capacity my co-workers and I received literally thousands of calls ranging from minor medical illnesses, injuries, fires, and criminal complaints to extremely tragic and horrifying 9-1-1 calls - the kind of calls that are seared into our memories forever.

In the patient care chain of survival, 9-1-1 Specialists, are without a doubt the true first, first responder, and as such, are confronted with callers that are experiencing one of the worse days of their lives. Callers' emotions can range from crying, sobbing, screaming, praying, cursing, threatening, to even an inability to respond due to complete and utter shock. 9-1-1 Specialists receive these calls when the callers' emotions are new and extremely raw, yet as trained to do, 9-1-1 Specialists remain calm, composed, and professional while keeping their own emotions suppressed in order to do the job.

9-1-1 Specialists realize that when hired they'll have to work various shifts; days, evening, nights, weekends, holidays, and that most, if not all of the calls received will be a report of a negative occurrence – whether illness, injury, fire, or criminal activity. However no amount of training can prepare 9-1-1 Specialists for the calls that will forever affect them.

In 1998 I became a Quality Assurance Administrator at the 9-1-1 Center, where I was tasked with making audio recordings for Freedom of Information Requests, primarily for defense and prosecuting attorneys, as well as randomly reviewing 9-1-1 calls to ensure the 9-1-1 Specialists were performing to the highest standard. While working in this position I was required to listen to and record some of the worse calls imaginable – all of which a 9-1-1 Specialist had handled previously.

I retired from Washington County in February 2020, after working 36 years at the 9-1-1 center. Although I could describe hundreds of similarly tragic calls, I've relayed just a few of the tragic calls that I have received or heard while recording audiotapes:

During my first few months as a 9-1-1 Specialist, **I answered a call from a grandmother that had found her 2 year old grandson unresponsive in their swimming pool.** The child was resuscitated. I was overjoyed to have been part of the team that saved this young boy's life. But the elation was short-lived as I found out within days that the little boy had been taken off of life support, dying soon after. I almost quit my job over that call.

One day I received a call reporting "a dead guy" near the Antietam Battlefield. As I attempted to obtain a more specific location from the caller I hear a gunshot. **The caller had committed suicide while I was on the phone with him.**

**A mother was reporting that her 14 year old son had shot himself while the family had gone to the grocery store.** As the 9-1-1 Specialist was directing the mother to get her son to the floor so she could relay CPR instructions, the mother screamed in excruciating detail the current condition of her son's injuries and why it would be impossible to do mouth-to-mouth.

Our 9-1-1 center received a call reporting a very young mother was in labor. The 9-1-1 Specialist helped the caller deliver a healthy baby boy. A few short weeks later the **same 9-1-1 Specialist answered a 9-1-1 call reporting the same baby boy was choking on candy** given to him by his mother - supposedly in an effort to get the baby to stop crying. The baby did not survive.

**A young wife called to report that her husband had hung himself in the barn.** When trying to have the wife cut him down so that the 9-1-1 Specialist could relay instructions for resuscitation, the very distraught and sobbing caller explained that the victim was nearly decapitated as he had used a bicycle chain to hang himself.

The most emotionally traumatizing call that I personally ever received on 9-1-1 was from a hysterical **mother reporting that her toddler had been struck by her own vehicle** when it had accidentally been put into "reverse" instead of "drive." Once it was evident that the child wasn't breathing, I directed the mother to start compressions. The toddler's mother screamed "You don't get it, (expletive)! My daughter's head's crushed!" That call and the mother's screaming haunted me for years.

Although most 9-1-1 Specialists will not suffer from lasting emotional trauma as a result of horrific calls handled during their career, there will be a few who will suffer from PTSD. 9-1-1 Specialists have been there for us during difficult times. **Now it's time to be there for them by voting in favor of SB374.**