BACKGROUND

Public Safety Dispatchers or Public Safety Telecommunicators play a vital role in emergency response, which extends far beyond just dispatching calls for first responders like peace officers, firefighters, or paramedics.

Public safety dispatchers are often on the front lines of emergencies that can mean the difference between life and death. When a hostage taker or suicidal person calls 9-1-1, the first contact they will have is with a dispatcher whose negotiation skills could prevent the situation from getting worse or even deadly.

California is home to approximately 6,160 emergency dispatchers who answer over 27 million 9-1-1 calls in a year, with an additional 28,000 emergency text messages. Dispatchers are trained to coach callers through first aid, collect vital information to provide situational awareness for responding officers, and negotiate in a variety of hostile situations.

ISSUE

The Federal Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system was established by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics to reflect the occupational structure in the country. Under the current system, dispatchers are considered “Office and Administrative Support Occupations,” which typically describes jobs like file clerks and office assistants.

Given the stress, level of training, and life-saving nature of the duties performed by dispatchers, the SOC classification is inaccurate and fails to recognize the highly skilled work of our nation’s dispatchers.

Public safety dispatchers are often responsible for being the first to respond to an accident or emergency. It is important that public safety dispatchers be properly recognized for their vital contribution to the safety and security of our state by redefining them as first responders.

By defining the occupation of public safety dispatchers as First Responders, California will be making a clear statement that recognizes dispatchers for the life-saving work that they perform heroically every day.

EXISTING LAW

Under existing law, the California Emergency Services Act, the Governor is authorized to proclaim a state of emergency, as defined, under specified circumstances.

Last year, the state of Texas passed House Bill 1090, which changed the state definition of a first responder to include public safety dispatchers. This bill was signed into law and went into effect in September 2019.

THIS BILL

AB 1945 would add public safety dispatchers to the current definition of first responder in California statute.

Specifically, AB 1945 would amend the California Emergency Services Act to define “first responder” as an employee of the state or a local public agency who provides emergency response services, including a peace officer, firefighter, paramedic, emergency medical technician, public safety dispatcher, public safety telecommunicator, emergency response communication employee, rescue service personnel, or emergency manager.

SUPPORT

California National Emergency Number Association (CALNENA)

Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials, Northern California Chapter (NAPCO)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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