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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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WATER, POWER AND OCEANS

The Honorable Shaun Donovan
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

The Honorable Howard A. Shelanski
Administrator
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Director Donovan and Administrator Shelanski:

I write to express my disappointment in the recent recommendation by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to classify public safety telecommunicator as an "Office and Administrative Support Occupation" in the draft Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). As a former 9-1-1 dispatcher, I know that public safety telecommunicators are professionals who are critical partners to our first responders, and I urge the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to classify these public safety workers as a "Protective Service Occupation" in the final SOC structure.

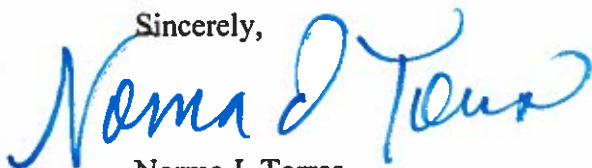
Public safety telecommunicators are required to receive specialized training and must either obtain national certification, state certification, or a combination of the two. National dispatcher certification associations often require advanced coursework to complete certification. For example, the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) offers an emergency medical dispatcher (EMD) certification which requires courses in anatomy and physiology, legal and liability issues, and stress management. These are rigorous subjects that virtually no administrative support personnel in any field is required to learn or understand. Additionally, dispatchers often have to take additional exams offered by their potential employers, including a written exam to ensure knowledge of local law enforcement rules and procedures. Dispatchers also are tested regularly by their departments for knowledge of local, state, and federal laws. Initial and ongoing training is a vital part of a 9-1-1 dispatcher's career, and these training requirements clearly demonstrate that dispatchers must possess a level of knowledge and education that far exceeds what is generally required of administrative personnel. OMB must take this training into account if it hopes to develop an accurate occupational classification structure.

I know firsthand that public safety telecommunicators are not just support staff, but are integral members of first responder teams who do far more than answer a phone and send help. During critical incidents such as large fires, civil unrest, or weather related incidents, telecommunicators are mobilized just like police and fire personnel. My fellow dispatchers also work in life-or-death situations, often talking to callers in their greatest hour of need. As a former dispatcher I know firsthand that on any given day, they may take a call from an individual on the brink of committing suicide or must gather key information if a crime is in progress to be later be used in court. In fact, conversations between dispatchers and suspects are often Miranda exempt, and testimony from dispatchers can serve as critical evidence in court proceedings. I also know that too often dispatchers may be forced to act as hostage negotiators and, in some instances, they may even have to provide life-saving first aid until first responders can arrive. Furthermore, the decisions dispatchers make can impact not only the lives of callers, but also the lives of many others. For example, in the immediate aftermath of the San Bernardino shooting, it was a 9-1-1 dispatcher who took the initial emergency call and helped law enforcement track down the shooters. Just as other first responders, our public safety telecommunicators must remain calm and use their training to think quickly about how best to respond to an emergency, and without the unique skills and abilities of our dispatchers, first responders would simply be unable to do their jobs.

It is clear that our dispatchers do not simply provide administrative support but are an important part of the first responder community. This is a specialized occupation that requires professionals to think critically and use skills and training that are vital to the lifesaving efforts of first responders. I sincerely hope OMB will take these factors into account as it adopts its revised SOC and therefore urge you to categorize public safety telecommunicators appropriately as a "Protective Service Occupation."

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,



Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress