



**ASSOCIATION OF
PUBLIC-SAFETY
COMMUNICATIONS
OFFICIALS-
INTERNATIONAL, INC.**

MONTANA CHAPTER

20 Year Retirement for Public Safety Dispatchers - Montana APCO Proposal

This legislative proposal provides for Montana's Public Safety Dispatchers to join the Sheriff's Retirement System, which offers 20 year retirement. Most of the Public Safety Dispatchers in Montana are currently members of the Public Employees' Retirement System, which requires 30 years of service to full retirement. This legislation will benefit the dispatchers, the public safety community and the general public.

- **Public Safety Dispatchers play a critical role in the safety of responders and the public requiring emergency assistance.** The dispatcher who receives the call is literally the first person on the scene of the incident. They are the life-line between the public and the emergency responders by gathering and providing information to ensure the safest response to the incident. They must be able to answer multiple emergent and non-emergent telephone lines, send fire and/or medical responders, and dispatch law enforcement officers – under a very specific set of policy guidelines. Many Public Safety Dispatchers have additional duties such as staffing an information desk.
- **The Public Safety Dispatcher profession has historically been one that experiences high personnel turnover rates and frequent vacancies.** The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials-International, Inc. (APCO) studied this issue in Project RETAINS. The Project RETAINS study found that many 9-1-1 and Public Safety Communications personnel leave the job after only a few years of service often because they realize that given the stressful and demanding nature of the job, they cannot reasonably expect to stay in the job long enough to retire. It is costly to hire and train their replacement.
- **The recommendation from Project RETAINS was that the retirement benefits for Public Safety Dispatcher should not substantially differ from that of Law Enforcement, Fire/Rescue and EMS personnel.** In some states and local jurisdictions, dispatchers are in the same classification as law enforcement and emergency responders and able to retire in 20 years.
- **This legislation would encourage employee retention and experience.** A 20 year retirement option would attract applicants who would choose public safety as a career. It will encourage current and future employees to remain in their position. This often life-saving work is wonderfully rewarding, but carries the enormous responsibility of making split second decisions in a stressful, time critical, error free environment, while being empathetic to citizens who are often distraught in highly emotional, life threatening situations.

- **This legislation will reduce risk and liability for the emergency responders and the public.** When a Public Safety Dispatcher lacks experience or is exhausted from too many years in a stressful profession or when the dispatch center is understaffed there is added risk to the responders and the public. The ability to choose to enter this profession and plan for a 20 year retirement will be an incentive for applicants resulting in good employees with a high level of skills and less turnover.
- **While allowing Public Safety Dispatchers to move into the Sheriff's Retirement System will require additional contributions from the employer and the employee, the costs will be balanced by a reduction in taxpayer dollars required to continually train new dispatchers only to have them leave employment.** These emergency professionals should be eligible for the same retirement timeline as other professionals in the field. The retention of fully trained, experienced employees will be of benefit to our communities while reducing risk and liability.
- **This legislation was proposed as House Bill 31 in the 2009 legislative session. There was strong support from the public safety community.**

Thank you for considering this proposal. Please direct your questions or comments to:

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