



# **Rep. Kelly Introduces Bipartisan Bill To Help 9-1-1 Operators**

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WASHINGTON, DC – Today Congresswoman Robin Kelly (D-IL-02), introduced the bipartisan *Providing Resources and Occupational Training for Emotional Crisis and Trauma (PROTECT) 911 Act* to address important health and wellness issues for our nation’s 9-1-1 call-takers and dispatchers. Congresswoman Norma Torres (D-CA-35), Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA-01), and Congressman Peter Meijer (R-MI-03) are original cosponsors.

“Our nation’s 9-1-1 call takers and emergency dispatchers take calls from people experiencing some of the most distressing and desperate moments of their lives,” said Rep. Kelly. “They hear terrible, tragic, and violent crimes, all while trying to determine how best to help in the situation and communicate vital information to the person on the other end of the line. Too often, the mental health and well-being of our 9-1-1 operators and dispatchers is treated as an afterthought, if addressed at all. We need to ensure that the folks taking our most urgent calls are able to take care of themselves. I am proud to lead this bill along with my colleagues, Rep. Fitzpatrick, Rep. Torres, and Rep. Meijer, to provide help for these professionals working every day to keep our communities safe.”

“Our 9-1-1 dispatchers and call-takers have stepped up to serve their community, and when we need help, they answer our call and keep us safe in crisis situations,” said Rep. Fitzpatrick. “I am proud to support the bipartisan Providing Resources and Occupational Training for Emotional Crisis and Trauma (PROTECT) 911 Act, which calls attention to the mental health needs of our brave 9-1-1 professionals.”

“As a former 911 dispatcher with more than 17 years of experience, I know firsthand that the demands of the job are immense,” said Rep. Norma Torres. “Dispatchers help the public in their most vulnerable moments, and the PROTECT 911 Act can do the same for the telecommunicator community. Tracking data on suicides among emergency telecommunicators will help us better address this rising trend, and the grant programs for behavioral health and wellness programs will help save lives. I’m proud to partner with Rep. Kelly on this vital piece of legislation.”

“Emergency dispatchers selflessly serve their communities and are often confronted with stressful and tragic situations where they are the first line of assistance for those in need of help,” said Rep. Meijer. “Just as they work every day to keep us safe during these challenging circumstances, we need to ensure that they too are receiving the help and resources they need. I am proud to join this bipartisan effort alongside my colleagues to bring renewed focus to the mental health needs of these professionals.”

The *PROTECT 911 Act* includes several measures to advance health and wellness for 9-1-1 professionals, including:

- Establishing a system for tracking public safety telecommunicator suicides;
- Developing best practices to identify, prevent, and treat posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in public safety telecommunicators;
- Developing resources to help mental health professionals better treat these personnel; and
- Establishing grants for health and wellness programs in emergency communications centers.

“The 9-1-1 call-takers and dispatchers at KanComm and other emergency communications centers perform lifesaving work,” said Tammy Peterson, Director of Kankakee County Emergency Telephone System Board. “The long hours and stress can take a serious toll on their health and wellness. The grant programs and resources created by this legislation will help to ensure our 9-1-1 professionals have what they need to keep protecting our communities.”

“Public safety telecommunicators in Illinois and throughout the country have an extremely stressful job answering nearly a quarter billion 9-1-1 calls each year and handling emergency communications,” said Jason Kern, Executive Director of Southeast Emergency Communications in Crystal Lake, IL, and President of the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International. “This legislation is critical to address the mental fatigue many public safety telecommunicators face from dealing with tragedies daily. Identifying coping mechanisms can improve our quality of life and our careers, and help us to better protect the public and responders.”

“The PROTECT 911 Act is a crucial step toward addressing the reality that those who work in 9-1-1 unfortunately know all too well: that life under the headset can take a great emotional and psychological toll,” said Brian Fontes, CEO of NENA: The 9-1-1 Association. “We thank Representatives Kelly, Fitzpatrick, Torres, and Meijer for introducing this legislation; just as 9-1-1 professionals across the country work every day to keep Americans healthy and safe, these members of Congress are working to do the same for our nation’s first responders.