

Mr. Speaker, so few people know what it is like to be an emergency dispatcher and don't truly understand how crucial our role is. They don't get that without us. They don't get that without you. First responders wouldn't be able to do their jobs without someone's answering that 911 call.

Back when I served in the California State Assembly, the State budget crisis meant that 911 dispatchers were furloughed because they weren't exempt as public safety professionals. Hundreds of calls went unanswered. Who knows how many lives were put at risk? I spent months badgering Governor Schwarzenegger until he realized the catastrophic effect the policy was having on our State. God forbid there had been an event like San Bernardino during that time and calls couldn't get through or first responders didn't know where to go.

Sadly, too many people think of dispatchers as a little more than glorified receptionists. This means that they don't often get the resources, the training, and the support they need and deserve in order to do their jobs. Dispatchers are the first points of contact in the event of an emergency, and they are the sole link between those in trouble and the personnel who can help them. Better training and more support would go a long way toward improving service and increasing staff retention.

During this year's State of the Union, I had the honor of inviting as my guest the dispatch supervisor who directed radio and call traffic during the San Bernardino attack. While the police, fire, and EMS responders definitely deserve a lot of credit, there had been very little mention in the media about the key role the public safety telecommunicators played.

Annemarie Teall and her team were the ones behind the scene, making sure the first responders were deployed efficiently and effectively. They fielded calls from the community, from law enforcement agencies, and from callers from all over the country and the world. During a situation that can quickly become pure chaos, they stayed calm, took action, and helped save lives.

When she was here, Annemarie discussed the training she had received in dealing with these types of situations and how grateful she was for that training. Unfortunately, this kind of training isn't a regular occurrence.

Without public safety telecommunicators, our first responders can't do their jobs. The response of police, firefighters, and paramedics is dependent upon the quality and accuracy of the information the dispatcher is able to provide. Public safety telecommunicators don't just take calls and relay information; they also play a key role in coordinating multiple teams of first responders from multiple agencies during times of crisis. They are a vital link for police, fire, and EMS as they monitor their activities by radio and provide

them with information that can ensure their safety and an efficient, effective response.

911 dispatchers have also helped in the apprehension of criminals and have helped bring them to justice because, in many cases, they are witnesses to the crimes as they occur. In the case that I stated earlier, I was the only witness. It was that recorded call that brought justice to that little girl.

Public Safety Telecommunicators Week not only provides us with the opportunity to recognize the hard work of our dispatchers, but it is also a reminder to our constituents of the importance of maintaining emergency lines free for just that—emergencies. There is no excuse for 911 abuse. Some estimates indicate that 15 to 20 percent of incoming calls are nonemergencies. These calls could prevent legitimate emergency calls from getting through and being answered. For example, as a 911 dispatcher, I remember receiving calls from those who were asking for directions to Disneyland, who were asking if an earthquake had just occurred, or who were asking for the time of day. Those are not emergencies. Dispatchers can't send for assistance if they never receive the call.

911 is not an information line. Local governments have limited resources and few dispatchers. Many localities have info lines—for example, 311 or 511. I encourage individuals to look up their local police departments and have their nonemergency police numbers on hand. I also encourage them to add that information to their cell phones so that the number is readily available when they have emergencies.

I can give you many examples of when people have dialed 911 from a cell phone and the dispatcher does not have the accurate location. Imagine if you were in the middle of having a heart attack and if you were not able to voice your location. Having that local telephone number is important because your call would be expedited to the local paramedic or to the local police department that has jurisdiction over where you may be.

It is never too early to teach kids about the proper uses of 911. You never know when an emergency will happen, and your child may be the only one who is able to get help. Teach children how to dial the number and stay on the line and when they should and shouldn't dial 911. One bad example is when my children were looking for me. They knew at the time that I worked at the 911 center. They dialed 911 and asked for their mom. That is not a true, good 911 call. Discourage your children from making inquiries to that emergency line.

Every day, public safety dispatchers help save lives, provide comfort and reassurance, and are a critical part of our law enforcement teams, but, too often, their work goes unrecognized. When you need a calming voice to guide you through a crisis, when law enforcement, fire safety, and rescue personnel

are in need of seamless coordination at a moment's notice, when every second counts, they are on the other line. 911 dispatchers are the unsung heroes of the first responder community.

I want to share with you another story of a 911 dispatcher:

I had to make sacrifices as a soldier to serve my country, and I have to make sacrifices as a dispatcher to serve my community. I knew this when I chose this profession—we have to be on call; we have to work overtime; we have to work holidays; we have to work nights; we have to work weekends; and we have to be reachable 24/7, and it is tough.

I spent most of my life in the service of others—22 years in the military, 8 years with the Texas Youth Commission, over 2 years in Iraq assisting military forces, and nearly 8 years as a 911 dispatcher. I can't remember how many life events I have not been a part of because I was working, sacrificing, in order to help others. It is only tolerable and manageable with the assistance of my fellow team and family members helping me when I just couldn't get through it without their help.

We have committed ourselves to this calling, and we are very good at it. We have sacrificed ourselves in the service of others because someone had to do it.

That came from Richard Dulin of the Coleman Police Department.

The first thing he said when I answered the phone was: "I just shot myself in the heart." Given that he was still speaking, I figured he probably didn't hit his heart, but the point was pretty clear. I established that he had, in fact, shot himself in the chest about 30 minutes before he had dialed 911. He waited to call because he was not sure if he wanted to live.

Unfortunately, we don't tend to get a lot of closure, so I have no idea if he lived or died.

Kyle from Kitsap County, Washington.

The stories go on and on, and I could go on and on for the rest of the time and share with you about the wonderful work that these committed people do each and every single day for our communities.

I close, Mr. Speaker, by thanking the 911 dispatchers and recognizing the hard work they do for our communities every single day.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

SENATE ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

The Speaker announced his signature to an enrolled bill of the Senate of the following title:

S. 192. An act to reauthorize the Older Americans Act of 1965, and for other purposes.

ADJOURNMENT

Mrs. TORRES. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 4 o'clock and 29 minutes p.m.), under its previous order, the House adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, April 14, 2016, at 10 a.m. for morning-hour debate.