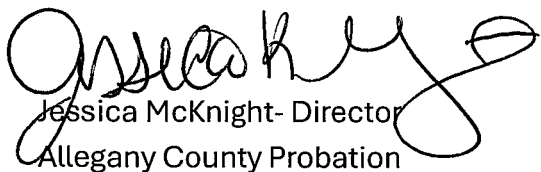


I am writing to express my strong support for passing legislation (A.9162A/S.7635B) that grants 911 dispatchers the option to retire after 25 years of dedicated service. As the true first, first responders, our emergency dispatchers are the vital lifeline connecting the public to life-saving assistance. It is time our retirement systems reflect the immense physical, emotional, and psychological toll of their profession.

911 dispatchers work under conditions of chronic, high-intensity stress. They routinely navigate life-or-death crises, talk citizens through traumatic events, and safeguard field personnel—all while maintaining absolute composure. This prolonged exposure to critical incidents leads to disproportionately high rates of compassion fatigue, PTSD, and severe burnout. Expecting these vital public safety professionals to sustain this level of performance for 30 or 35 years is unsustainable for their well-being and risks compromising public safety.

There is already a strong and successful precedent for this transition within our state's public safety framework. In 1999, state leadership recognized the grueling nature of community corrections and granted probation officers the option for a 25-year retirement. (This has not yet been adopted by Allegany County) The justifications used to protect probation officers over two decades ago applies just as urgently to 911 dispatchers today. Just like probation officers, dispatchers are integral pillars of the public safety continuum who face severe occupational stressors daily. Parity in retirement benefits is a matter of basic fairness and a crucial tool for recruiting and retaining talent in a field currently facing severe staffing shortages.

Securing a 25-year retirement option for 911 dispatchers honors their invaluable service, protects their health, and ensures that the individuals answering our community's darkest calls are sharp, supported, and resilient.



Jessica McKnight- Director
Allegany County Probation