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Sen. Cheryl Kagan, Chair
Steve Souder, Vice Chair

SB374: Workers' Compensation - Occupational Disease Presumptions - 9-1-1 Specialists
Senate Finance Committee | Tuesday, March 8, 2022

Chair Kelley and Vice Chair Feldman:

I have dedicated more than 50 years of my life to 9-1-1. I was there at the beginning -- when the first 9-1-1 call was made in Alabama. I ran 9-1-1 Centers in four different jurisdictions of the National Capital Region: Washington, DC, Arlington and Fairfax Counties in VA, and Montgomery County, MD. In addition to my current tenure on the 9-1-1 Board, I have served for the past four years as Vice Chair of Maryland's Next Generation 9-1-1 Commission alongside Sen. Cheryl Kagan (Chair).

[SB374](#) would establish a Workers' Compensation presumption for our 9-1-1 Specialists. This would allow these dedicated men and women to receive much-deserved benefits if they suffer mental health issues caused by the trauma they experience on the job. The eligibility for the presumption laid out in SB374 is specific. A 9-1-1 Specialist who is seeking compensation must be examined and diagnosed by a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist.

I have worked with hundreds of 9-1-1 Specialists. I have witnessed firsthand their strength and skill as they listen to heartbreaking stories and respond quickly and decisively to each emergency situation. I've also watched the tension, the stress, and the despair that accumulates day after day. This is a job that few people can do. The exposure to pain, sorrow, and injury leaves 9-1-1 Specialists vulnerable to the risk of psychological trauma. Many find it difficult to leave the emotions that they experience behind when they return home.

It's hard to fill these jobs and to retain these Specialists. According to the [National Emergency Numbers Association](#), "New hires and trainees are frequently gone before their probationary periods end. High performers with potentially bright futures move on for greener, higher-paying pastures too soon."

Without our 9-1-1 Specialists, our 9-1-1 Centers cannot operate. These "**First, First Responders**" deserve our respect and our support. They deserve the same Workers' Compensation benefits as other first responders.

I urge a favorable report on SB374.

Respectfully submitted,

Steve Souder

Vice Chair, NG911 Commission