

From: [Seamus Petrie](#)
To: [Conway, Sen. Steve](#); [Office State Actuary, WA](#); [Stokesbary, Rep. Drew](#)
Subject: PSERS Eligibility for Public Safety Telecommunicators
Date: Tuesday, November 15, 2022 11:07:09 AM

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To Chair Conway, Vice Chair Stokesbary, and the members of the Select Committee on Pension Policy:

I am writing on behalf of the Washington Public Employees Association, UFCW Local 365, asking you to support the legislation to make Public Safety Telecommunicators eligible for PSERS. WPEA represents Communications Officer 3s at the Washington State Patrol. Our members supervise dispatchers and 911 operators, and perform dispatching and 911 operator duties when staffing requires. Due to the state's ongoing crisis in recruitment and retention, "when staffing requires" has become more and more frequent.

You have heard testimony regarding the serious emotional and psychological toll of this work. One impact of that psychological toll is that staffing levels are extremely low. More than 60 Communication Officers (1s, 2s, 3s, and 4s combined) left their jobs in Fiscal Year 2022, and most have not been replaced. The Wenatchee communications center closed this year, due to low staffing levels. The remaining seven communication centers are facing vacancy rates of 40%, and the already overworked staff in those centers are now fielding more calls, now that Wenatchee closed.

Moving Public Safety Telecommunicators into PSERS will not only recognize how vital these folks are to public safety, it can help address the staffing crisis for these positions. The terms of PSERS will encourage Communications Officers to stay on for at least 10 years, to be eligible for earlier retirement.

During the latest collective bargaining process, we negotiated a 2-range targeted salary increase for Communication Officer 3s in the 2023-2025 contract, which will also help some with recruitment. But even with the increase coming, these members are behind market wages, according to the state's own salary survey. A pension that is a better fit for the work will be an additional incentive in attracting qualified candidates to these positions, and will help address the staffing crisis.

We appreciate your consideration of this legislation, and we strongly encourage you to recommend it to the legislature.

In Solidarity,
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