

PROPOSAL FOR RETIREMENT SYSTEM LEGISLATION
(for the 2013 Legislative Session)

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PROPOSER'S NAME/TITLE: Susan Bomstad / President
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1. Which retirement systems would be covered by the legislation?

Most Public-Safety Dispatchers in Montana are covered under the Public Employee Retirement System and must work 30 years before they are eligible for retirement. The Montana Chapter of the Public-Safety Communications Officials, International, Inc. proposes that the Public-Safety Dispatchers in Montana join the Sheriff Retirement System, which offers an early (reduced) retirement option at 20 years of service.

PERS and SRS are covered under this legislation.

2. What is the problem or issue?

See attached proposal.

3. What do you want the legislation to do?

See attached proposal. Allow Public-Safety Dispatchers the ability to retire at 20 years under SRS.

4. If possible, please list the Montana Code Annotated (MCA) sections to be amended.

19-7-101, 19-7-301, 19-7-302

5. If the proposed change requires additional funding, what funding sources do you propose (i.e., an increase in employer contributions, employee contributions, both, other?)

We propose both an increase in employer and employee contributions. We predict a cost recovery to the organization through reduced employee turnover (recruiting, hiring and training costs). This legislation is a step toward benefit, recognition, and professional parity with the rest of the public safety disciplines. It will increase employee retention, which will decrease liability, which is difficult to quantify.

6. Has similar legislation been requested in the past, been considered in another state, or provided as a model act? If so, please provide a citation, reference, or point of contact.

This legislation was proposed in the 2009 and 2011 Montana State legislature. HB31 was introduced to the 2009 legislature at the request of the State Administration and Veteran's Affairs Interim Committee and carried by Representative Franke Wilmer, the 2007-2008 SAVA Committee chair. HB31 was tabled in the House State Administration committee. Representative Wilmer carried the same bill (HB328) in the 2011 legislature, which failed in the House State Administration committee.

Some states that provide for a 20 or 25 year retirement for Public-Safety Dispatchers, either by classifying them as law enforcement, first responders, or through legislation (have proposed/passed legislation or are actively planning to pursue early retirement through legislation) are Oregon, Alaska, New York, New Mexico, Wyoming, Oklahoma, Florida, Massachusetts, some dispatch centers in Virginia. New Mexico's legislation was HB280 in 2007. Wyoming Public-Safety Dispatchers retire under the same 20 year retirement provision as law enforcement officers. The Washington APCO Chapter has been discussing their plans to introduce similar retirement legislation. Public-Safety Dispatchers in Montana are eligible to join the Sheriff's Retirement System if they are certified as Detention Officers. The Dispatchers in some smaller agencies are required to perform jail duties and are members of SRS.

7. If you are a holdover senator or unopposed legislative candidate, would you like to make this a formal bill draft request for the 2013 Legislative Session?

Not applicable.

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM BY AUGUST 1, 2012



MONTANA CHAPTER

Reduced Retirement for Public Safety Dispatchers **Montana APCO's proposal / position** **for the 2013 Montana Legislature**

Montana APCO proposes that Montana's Public Safety Dispatchers join the Sheriff's Retirement System, which offers the option of a reduced retirement at 20 years. Most of the Public Safety Dispatchers in Montana are currently members of the Public Employees' Retirement System, which requires 30 years of service to full retirement. This legislation will benefit the dispatchers, the public safety community and the general public.

- **The Public Safety Dispatcher profession has historically been one that experiences high personnel turnover rates and frequent vacancies.** The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials-International, Inc. (APCO) studied this issue in Project RETAINS. The Project RETAINS study found that many 9-1-1 and Public Safety Communications personnel leave the job after only a few years of service often because they realize that given the stressful and demanding nature of the job, they cannot reasonably expect to stay in the job long enough to retire. It is costly to hire and train their replacement. While it is estimated that 97% of Law Enforcement and Fire-Rescue personnel WILL work long enough to retire, 97% of public safety communications personnel WILL NOT work long enough to retire.
- **The recommendation from Project RETAINS is that the retirement benefits for Public Safety Dispatcher should not substantially differ from that of Law Enforcement, Fire/Rescue and EMS personnel.** In some states and local jurisdictions, dispatchers are in the same classification as law enforcement and emergency responders and able to retire in 20 years. Sadly, in many states, including our own, they are not. Just as their first responder counterparts in the field, Public Safety Dispatchers' shifts must cover 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days per year, including nights, weekends, holidays, birthdays, during their kids ballgames (you get the idea).
- **This legislation would encourage employee retention and experience.** A 20 year retirement option would attract applicants who would choose public safety as a career. It will encourage current and future employees to remain in their position. This often life-saving work, is wonderfully rewarding, but carries the enormous responsibility of making split second decisions in a stressful, time critical, error free environment, while being empathetic to citizens who are often distraught in highly emotional, life threatening situations.

- **Public Safety Dispatchers play a critical role in the safety of responders and the public requiring emergency assistance.** The call-taker is literally the first person on the scene of the incident being reported. They are the life-line between the public and emergency responders in the field by gathering and providing information to ensure the safest response to the incident. They must be able to answer multiple emergent and non-emergent telephone lines, send fire and/or medical responders, and dispatch law enforcement officers – under a very specific set of policy guidelines. Many Public Safety Dispatchers have additional duties such as staffing an information desk.
- **This legislation will reduce risk and liability for the emergency responders and the public.** When a Public Safety Dispatcher lacks experience or is exhausted from too many years in a stressful profession or when the dispatch center is understaffed there is added risk to the responders and the public. The ability to choose to enter this profession and plan for a 20 year retirement will be an incentive for applicants resulting in good employees with a high level of skills and less turnover.
- **While allowing Public Safety Dispatchers to move into the Sheriff's Retirement System will require additional contributions from the employer and the employee, the costs will be balanced by a reduction in taxpayer dollars required to continually train new dispatchers only to have them leave employment.** These emergency professionals should be eligible for the same retirement timeline as other professionals in the field. The retention of fully trained, experienced employees will be of benefit to our communities while reducing risk and liability.
- **This legislation was proposed in the 2009 and 2011 legislative sessions (HB31 and HB328, respectively). There was strong support from the public safety community.**

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