<<Date>>

Virginia General Assembly

Attn: Senator/Delegate (delete title that does not apply) <<fill in appropriate name>>

<<Address1>>

<<Address2>>

<<City>>, VA <<Zip Code>>

Dear Senator/Delegate (delete title that does not apply) <<fill in appropriate name>>:

On behalf of the over 2,000 9-1-1 professionals in the Commonwealth of Virginia, we/I write today to urge your support for [HB 131](https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?221+sum+HB131), [HB 854](https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?221+sum+HB854), [SB 361](https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?221+sum+SB361), and [SB 585](https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?221+sum+SB585). These bills will not just provide 9-1-1 professionals with the benefits they deserve for their hard work and dedication but will also provide 9-1-1 with the ability to better attract and retain talented professionals — a must in the midst of the 9-1-1 staffing crisis.

HB 131 and HB 854 and SB 585 provide 9-1-1 dispatchers with the opportunity to receive enhanced retirement benefits for hazardous duty service alongside their first responder counterparts. The work performed by professionals in the 9-1-1 center is challenging, stressful, and requires extensive technical skills and training — a far cry from merely answering phone calls. These bills are not only about recognizing this reality and giving 9-1-1 professionals the respect which they deserve, but also about allowing 9-1-1 to attract talented and dedicated individuals who are willing to answer the call for public safety.

The National Emergency Number Association has reported the turnover rate for many 9-1-1 centers is 15 to 20% annually. The International Academies of Emergency Dispatch report that some 9-1-1 centers currently have 30 to 50% of their positions vacant. This change to benefits would encourage more of these professionals to make this a career which may assist with reducing the high turnover rates in these positions. Of the bills listed, HB 131 provides these benefits only to individuals hired after January 1, 2022. We urge you to remove this date stipulation and provide these benefits to all 9-1-1 professionals regardless of their hire date as a way to begin to address the turnover rate and address a portion of the current staffing crisis.

The 9-1-1 dispatchers were and continue to be an essential part of the response to the pandemic and have worked many hours of overtime to make sure that emergency calls did not go unanswered. Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, Colorado, Texas, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, New Jersey, and West Virginia have recognized 9-1-1 dispatchers as first responders. It is time for Virginia to join these states and demonstrate to these employees that the General Assembly recognizes their incredible contribution to making the Commonwealth a safer place.

We thank you for your consideration of these crucial bills and the efforts you take to show the numerous 9-1-1 dispatchers across the Commonwealth that you support them.

Sincerely,

(Include your name, agency, and address)