

Reclassification of Public Safety Telecommunicators

The Problem:

Public safety telecommunicators provide lifesaving emergency medical instruction, deal with suicidal persons, assess scene safety for arriving responders, and have a critical role for a variety of emergencies. This is difficult work that often comes with high burnout rates and significant mental health impacts.

Unfortunately, the federal government currently classifies these professionals as administrative/clerical occupations. The [Standard Occupational Classification \(SOC\)](#) is a vast catalog of occupations, maintained by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), that is used by federal agencies for statistical purposes. The current version of the SOC categorizes public safety telecommunicators as “Office and Administrative Support Occupations,” which includes secretaries, office clerks, and taxicab dispatchers. This classification is inaccurate and a disservice to their lifesaving work. Public safety telecommunicators should be categorized as “Protective Service Occupations,” which includes law enforcement and fire, plus parking enforcement workers, playground monitors, and several other occupations that are arguably less “protective” than 9-1-1 professionals.

The Solution:

Federal legislation can correct the classification of public safety telecommunicators.

- Bipartisan, zero cost legislation that would direct OMB to correct the federal classification of public safety telecommunicators has been introduced in the House of Representatives as the 9-1-1 SAVES Act ([H.R. 6319](#)) and in the Senate as the Enhancing First Response Act ([S. 3556](#)), which also includes several other provisions to support public safety communications.¹
- Under the SOC’s classification rules, occupations are supposed to be grouped based on the work performed. The work performed by public safety telecommunicators – such as coaching callers through CPR, dealing with active shooters – is inherently protective.
- Correcting the classification of public safety telecommunicators would make the SOC a more accurate and useful statistical resource.
- Correcting the SOC would have no direct impact on salaries or benefits, but would provide much-deserved recognition for 9-1-1 professionals.

¹ In addition to directing OMB to fix the federal classification of 9-1-1 professionals, the Enhancing First Response Act would improve the information shared with ECCs during network outages and direct the Federal Communications Commission to evaluate the impacts of Kari’s Law (a 2017 bill that required multi-line telephone systems to support calling 9-1-1 without the need to dial a prefix such as “9” first to get an outside line).