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**VIRGINIA CHAPTER of
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Dear Madam Chair and Committee Members,

I am here to represent the over 2,000 9-1-1 professionals in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and I come before you today to urge your support for House Bills 131 & 854. Along with Senate Bill 585 currently in the Senate, these bills will not only 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.

9-1-1 dispatchers are known as the FIRST, first responders, because without us, no first responder would ever be dispatched on an incident. We experience many of the same psychological trauma and stressors as law enforcement, firefighters, and EMS personnel.

HB 131 & HB 854 (along with SB 585) provide 9-1-1 dispatchers with the opportunity to receive enhanced retirement benefits for hazardous duty service alongside our first responder counterparts. The work performed by professionals, like me, 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 we 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 (NENA) 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. We lose staff due to the stress of the job, the long hours, the intensity and sometimes just because you never get closure. This change to benefits would encourage more of these professionals to make 9-1-1 a career, which may assist with reducing the high turnover rates in these positions. These bills would also help to recognize emergency 9-1-1 telecommunicators as first responders which will assist in a long overdue reclassification.

I am currently the Secretary of the Virginia Chapter of NENA and have been a telecommunicator for 26 years. I started off as a calltaker and have worked my way to Assistant Director of one of the largest PSAPs in Virginia. NENA is a leading organization that allows for development, availability,

implementation, and enhancement of 9-1-1 services to all jurisdictions across the State and in the Country.

We strive for immediate access to advanced emergency public safety services to protect the safety of human life, property, and civic welfare for all those who live, work, and travel in Virginia. We have 551 members representing the 119 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) in the Commonwealth and membership includes front line telecommunicators, dispatchers, as well as PSAP managers, directors, GIS professionals, and industry partner representatives. Our members live, work, and serve in every one of Virginia's cities and counties.

I thank you for your support of House Bills 131 & 854 and for the opportunity to speak in favor of all 3 bills currently in the General Assembly. Thank you.

Tracy M. Zingg
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