

My name is Jessica Graham, Public Safety Telecommunicator, Certified Training Officer of Chouteau County 9-1-1. I am also a United States Navy Veteran who understands what sacrifice means and dedicating yourself to the public. I serve the public, I am the first, first responder for you when you are in a crisis and need aid. In the eyes of the state and federal law, I am considered a clerical worker or administration. A clerical worker does not do what I do.

I am the one getting the location and obtaining the critical information needed to get the correct help to you. Often while you are living your worst moment, I am the calm voice on the other end getting the police, firefighters, and EMT's to you. I am providing you with live-saving instructions or just reassuring you help is on the way, I am also sometimes the last voice someone will hear while they take their last breath. Telecommunicators talk people out of committing violent crimes and have talked people out of committing suicide. WE guide you through CPR, not only am I responsible for you, I am also responsible for keeping my deputies/officers and other responders safe by giving them accurate information for when they arrive. A clerical worker won't hear a desperate teen, say "I don't want to live" and then pull the trigger. Nor will they hear a mother begging for you to save her child's life.

When my shift is over, I don't just forget about my callers, I take them home with me. I wonder if they lived. I hear their pleas for help while I kiss my children good night. I relive the wife begging for her husband of 60 years to breath, and telling me she can't go on with CPR, all while I keep urging her on and telling her help is on the way. I hear the father's silent cry, who just reported his child is missing and it's dark outside. I hear the child's scream for help because her mother's boyfriend is beating her mom.

I do not work your average 9-5 job Monday through Friday. I work all hours, sometimes with no breaks, I work every single day there are no special Holidays for me. I miss Thanksgiving, Christmas, and birthdays with my kids. Dispatchers suffer the same amount of trauma as police, firefighters, and EMT's do, I cannot see the scene, but I can hear it. I go through the same amount of training, if not more as other first responders.

My job is not a job, it is a calling, that only a few can handle. I show up every day and start my shift with a prayer, and when I go home, I say another prayer. I urge you to pass this resolution, we have earned the right to be called first responders. We deserve to be recognized and reclassified. I am not a clerical worker, I am 9-1-1, I am the first, first responder.