



CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE UNION

Good morning, Senator Hartley, Representative Dargan and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee.

My name is Andrew Matthews and I am the President of the Connecticut State Police Union, which represents approximately 1,079 Troopers, Sergeants and Master Sergeants. Today we are here to speak **IN SUPPORT OF:**

PROPOSED SENATE BILL NO. 426

AN ACT SUSPENDING AND EVALUATING THE CONSOLIDATION OF DISPATCH CENTERS WITHIN THE DIVISION OF STATE POLICE

The State Police Union supports this Bill because consolidated dispatch within the State Police has put the safety of the public and our membership more at risk by creating situations where Troops are closed to the public, Troop areas do not have sufficient patrol coverage to respond to emergency calls in a timely manner, and because consolidating dispatch operations has created significant delays in information being transmitted into the field, resulting in increased response times to emergencies. Moreover, consolidated dispatch cost taxpayers millions of dollars in equipment and has created an average of 2,000 hours a month in overtime. Suspending and reversing the negative effects of consolidated dispatch and allowing time to carefully evaluate and correct the flaws will ultimately enhance public safety.

In May of 2012, the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) began consolidating State Police dispatch operations at Troop A (Southbury), Troop B (North Canaan) and Troop L (Litchfield). In September of 2013, DESPP merged Troop D (Danielson), Troop K (Colchester), Troop E (Montville) and Troop C (Tolland). This dramatic departure from a dispatch system that had worked well for decades occurred without holding public hearings, seeking legislative approval or even the input of the Troopers in the field. Again, the Union must stress that without any input beyond a handful of high ranking members of DESPP decided it was in the best interest of public safety to install alarm systems in our Troops, lock the doors and turn the lights off during the evening hours -- closing the only police department available for numerous towns in some areas. DESPP did this claiming that the consolidations would "achieve efficiencies and cost savings", would "redeploy sworn Troopers back to patrol", would "improve emergency communications and dispatch functions" and would "enhance public safety." Unfortunately, after much evidence to the contrary, many are beginning to realize that there is little truth to these claims.

In order to fully understand the drastic change in service; one must understand how State Police Troop dispatching functioned prior to the mergers compared to the new consolidated dispatch operation. Prior to the consolidation each Troop had two experienced individuals who were





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familiar with the geographical areas answering routine and 911 calls with the ability to immediately dispatch Troopers to calls for service. Now, newly hired and inexperienced dispatchers are not familiar with the Troop areas they are responsible for and "call takers" only answer calls and input the information into a computer. The information entered by call takers is sent to the dispatchers minutes later and only then are Troopers dispatched to calls. Call takers do not have the capability of dispatching new information during an emergency directly to the Troopers out in the field. Moreover, if more than one critical incident occurs at a time, there will likely be catastrophic failure.

The impact of prisoner transport – and its impact on patrol levels – is another important difference between consolidated and traditional dispatch operations. Prior to consolidation, Troopers would make arrests and transport the prisoners back to the Troop for processing. Once a prisoner was processed, the Trooper would return to their nearby patrol area. Under the new system, two patrol Troopers are forced to return to the Troop to process the prisoners and if not released, Troopers are required to travel well outside their Troop areas to transport prisoners to Hartford, New Haven, Corrigan or York Correctional. This practice often reduces our minimum patrol staffing levels, affects our ability to provide proper back up and creates longer response times.

The State Police Union leadership is opposed to this consolidation because it has and continues to negatively affect telephone services, police and emergency dispatch functions, response times, as well as Troop staffing levels. Notably, some of our Troops are no longer adequate safe havens for victims of domestic violence, sexual assaults or other crimes against citizens that need the immediate intervention of a State Trooper. For example, it recently came to our attention that for years a victim of domestic violence had exchanged custody for visitation of her five-year-old son with her ex-husband/batterer at a State Police barracks. However, one day as she arrived at the Troop, and as she approached the front door she noticed that the interior lights were off and as she attempted to open the door to the lobby, surprisingly she discovered the door was locked and that no Troopers were on the property. Sadly, she stated that she feared that when her ex-husband discovered the State Police Troops were no longer occupied by Troopers, he would continue threatening her and even try to assault her.

In closing, for nearly two years, the State Police Union has attempted to discuss the real risks associated with dispatch consolidations and our genuine concerns for public safety and the safety of all State Troopers. Unfortunately, the Union leadership and the membership were ignored. Our invaluable experience could have contributed to improving dispatch operations rather than the systematic failures of the dispatch plan that was implemented. However, we are optimistic that newly-appointed Commissioner Dora Schriro will provide the leadership that the State Police need to address these problems. In fact, in three short weeks, the Union leadership has met with Commissioner Schriro on three occasions – which is more than the former Commissioner





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and current Colonel have done in three years. The Commissioner is carefully analyzing consolidated dispatch, she has traveled around the state and has generously allowed Troopers the opportunity to provide her with critical information to ensure we succeed. As such, we remain convinced that the most suitable way to avoid any further risk to the public and Troopers is to cease implementing and supporting a failing plan, but rather seek the input of the men and women who perform front line patrol and discuss any potential consequences of the consolidation with them to prevent or limit any further exposure.

We thank the committee for your consideration on this important issue and would be happy to answer any questions.

March 11, 2014
UNION

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Andrew Matthews, Esq. – President



