



CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE UNION

Good afternoon Senator Larson, Representative Dargan and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee.

My name is Andrew Matthews. I am the President of the Connecticut State Police Union, which represents approximately 1,051 Troopers, Sergeants and Master Sergeants and I am also the Chairman-Elect of the National Troopers Coalition, which represents nearly 42,000 State Troopers around the country. Today we are here to speak *IN SUPPORT OF*:

PROPOSED HOUSE BILL NO. 5105

AN ACT CONCERNING THE 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 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 a significant increase in overtime. Suspending and reversing the negative effects of consolidated dispatch and allowing Commissioner Schriro 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. The Union must stress that without any input beyond a handful of high ranking members of DESPP, former Commissioner Reuben Bradford and former Colonel Danny Stebbins 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. The State Police 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 have realized that there is little truth to these claims.

Before addressing how consolidated dispatch works in more detail, the Union must recognize that, unlike her predecessor, Commissioner Dora Schriro has made a concerted effort to work with the Union and community leaders to address concerns about dispatch consolidation. This includes restoring 24-7 staffing of State Police barracks and forming advisory groups and a steering committee to seek the input of the men and women performing the job. The Commissioner, along with Colonel Brian Meraviglia and Lt. Col. Butch Hyatt have committed to a continuing analysis of consolidated dispatch policies.



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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 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.

Another important difference between consolidated and traditional dispatch operations, is the impact of prisoner transport – and its impact on patrol levels. 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 Troopers are required to travel well outside their Troop areas to transport prisoners to Hartford, New Haven, Corrigan or York Correctional if the prisoner cannot be released. This practice often reduces our minimum patrol staffing levels, affects our ability to provide proper back up and creates longer response times.

In closing, for nearly three years, the State Police Union leadership has been 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. Under the previous administration, the State Police Union 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. Under the leadership of Commissioner Schriro, Colonel Meraviglia and Lt. Colonel Hyatt, the membership has been treated as partners in finding solutions to issues regarding the health, safety and welfare of both the public and our Troopers. We are optimistic that Commissioner Dora Schriro will continue to provide the leadership that is necessary to reverse this dangerous and ineffective policy. The Commissioner has and continues to carefully analyze 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 continue to discuss any potential consequences of the consolidation and prevent or limit any further liability.

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

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CONNECTICUT STATE POLICE UNION
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