



**Lora Ueland, President**

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**RE: Reclassification and Certification of 911 Professionals**

WA APCO/NENA Membership,

The federal government failed to reclass 911 from clerical to public safety in 2018 and again in 2019 when the 911 SAVES Act was introduced and then allowed to stall. As many other states have done, WA APCO/NENA decided to seek state-level recognition of 911 professionals. It was a step towards bigger change and one we felt worth taking.

State reclassification for 911 professionals and certification was on track to be realized in the 2021 legislative session. The intent of this legislation is, and always has been, to elevate and recognize the 911 men and women who serve as highly trained, skilled professionals essential to public safety. The draft bill established public safety telecommunicator certification, mandatory initial training standards, recertification requirements including continuing education, and decertification parameters. It also recognized public safety telecommunicator work classification as public safety first responders without changing any existing benefits, such as retirement.

Chapter leadership has been meeting with State Legislators and gathering support from influential Representatives, including a prime sponsor, who was prepared to introduce the draft bill. The work that was done to get to this point was immense and has occurred over many years with input from you the membership, feedback and guidance from our lobbyist Scott Sigmon, who has excellent access to key legislators, conversations with other public safety organizations, such as WASPC, State Fire Chiefs Association and Organized Labor, in order to hear the concerns and make adjustments. This all led to a collaborative development of the draft legislation.

In 2019 and as recent as late 2020, we met with labor organizations to discuss their recommended adjustments to the bill which included better labor representation on the certification board and concerns about decertification. From those discussions, we understood we had successfully met their expectations and had their support for the bill. Unfortunately, in a meeting with the prime sponsor just days before the opening of the session, we learned Organized Labor, the Teamsters, AFSCME, and SEIU, did not support the bill and would actively oppose it. Their stated opposition was threefold:

- 1) Reclassification at a state level is pointless and does not add any value to the labor force without a federal change or changes in benefits such as retirement;
- 2) Any decertification;
- 3) The inclusion of the APCO training standard, because it is a “private company.”

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This opposition effectively killed the bill before it could be introduced to law makers for discussion and committee assignment.

WA APCO/NENA believes a state level classification for telecommunicators is another step closer to realizing federal recognition and positioning for gaining better benefits. Also, creating a certification requirement to ensure 911 leadership statewide provide the same minimum level of training to their telecommunicators is another avenue to elevate awareness that this job requires unique skills, abilities and knowledge to perform. Police Officers, Firefighters, EMTs, Paramedics, and Corrections Officers all must be certified as receiving minimum training content before they are entrusted to carry out their duties. Telecommunicators, being just as vital to public safety as their certified peers, should also have minimum training requirements. Our message to legislators has consistently been, regardless of where the 911 call was placed, the public should expect to receive the same level of service. This resonated with the legislators.

To learn of labor’s opposition this late in the process, with no time to adjust is deeply disappointing but we are not giving up; this is not the end. WA APCO/NENA will re-group, re-evaluate, and re-engage to try again in the 2022 legislative session. **If certification and reclassification are important to you, you need to contact your labor union or guild leadership and ask them to support legislation that recognizes you as an essential, certified public-safety professional who proudly stands next to police, fire and medical certified professionals. They need to hear that you want them to participate and support this effort and lend their voice to make it happen.**

You will find talking points, the draft legislation and contact information at our Chapter website, [www.waapconena.org](http://www.waapconena.org). We welcome your questions, comments and help. Thank you.

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