NAME	EMPLOYEE #	SIGN, IF YOU AGREE.
Loretta Miller	5653	
Francis Shute	2275	
Frank Blefari	8109	
Richard Kulis	9086	
Joseph Kardos	9205	
Kevin Melly	9207	
Alan Shaw	9210	
Timothy Croke	9489	
Angela Mitchell	10788	
Shemaine Johnson	10791	
Marilyn Lundgren	10795	
Christine Zarmsky	10796	
Leah Jordhamo	10858	
Sharon Ritchie	10859	
Melanie Semmel	11902	
Anthony Smith	14633	
Michael Lockwood	14639	
Todd Bassett	14867	
Ladrina Coleman	21015	
Pamela Critser	21305	
Colin Kennedy	22025	
Steven Loddo	22026	
Steven Estabrook	22314	
Alberto Valbuena	22676	
Kristi Schulze	22678	
Heather Fallon	22809	
Walter Junker	10792	
Erin Few	23376	
Courtney Lawler	23378	
Alyssa Frattaroli	23995	

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JUL 21 2014
BY: VTR TIME 1:25pm
BOARD OF REPRESENTATIVES

I'm writing this letter on behalf of the 30 Public Safety Dispatchers (PSDs) that work in the Stamford Department of Emergency Communications, otherwise known as the 911 Communications Center.

In a recent survey of some of the largest cities in Connecticut (based on the most recent US Census population records), where Stamford ranked 4th largest, it was found that most operate their 911 centers with a *minimum* of 8-10 persons per shift. That equates to a 40% - 50% increase in personnel for just an 11.852% increase in population between Stamford (minimum of 5 dispatchers for 121,026 people) and the most populated city, Bridgeport (minimum of 10 dispatchers for 137,298 people).
In addition to the 6.9% residential population increase since the year 2000, these figures don't even begin to account for the swell in population during the daytime hours, when Stamford is flooded with workers coming in from other areas. Stamford has many large construction projects that bring an influx of workers. Many of those projects are housing projects that are now seeing occupancy, the residents of which were not included in the census figures. The new Harbor Point project is scheduled to add an additional 4000 housing units alone! There is also 75 Tresser Blvd, the Lock Works at the old Yale & Towne site, as well as recent housing that has been built near UCONN, and on lower Summer St that are all adding to the population explosion. The City Of Stamford is getting bigger, not smaller. The dispatch center is answering more calls, not less.
We are doing more work, with less, and with much more stress. So much so, that the stress recently sent an on-duty dispatcher to the hospital due to chest pain.

Currently there are consoles to accommodate up to 9 PSDs (though not all are equipped to handle all positions), the staffing is such that there are approximately 7 PSDs assigned to each of the day (7a-3p) and evening (3p-11p) shifts. When staffing is full, there are four as call takers, two as police dispatchers, and one as a fire dispatcher.
On the overnight shift (11p-7a), 5 – 6 PSDs are assigned. When staffing is full, there are 2 - 3 as call takers, 2 as police dispatchers, and one as a fire dispatcher. All shifts have an SFRD fire supervisor to assist and supervise the fire dispatcher, and an SPD police supervisor to oversee the room.

Due to a May 8th, 2014 change in floor staffing, when a PSD takes their shift off, or calls in sick, the floor staffing for each shift is now allowed to drop to a minimum of 5. If it falls below that, then a PSD will be called back to bring the staffing level back to 5.
This is the second time since January 2009 that the floor staffing has been changed or reduced.

Although the police department and fire department have minimum shift staffing levels in their contracts in order to keep the staffing at the proper level required to keep the public safe, the city has refused, more than once, to allow a minimum staffing level to be included in our contract. Despite the Public Safety Dispatchers being the first 'First Responders' that the public has contact with, it seems the city does not care if we are understaffed and at risk of not being able to keep the public safe.

We are not asking for more, but we *are* asking for the staffing levels to be put back to what they were prior to January 2009; a 6 dispatcher minimum floor staff, 7 days per week on **all** shifts - 3 call-takers, 2 police dispatchers, and 1 fire dispatcher.

Prior to January 2009, if the staffing fell below 6 persons, due to a PSD taking their shift off, or calling in sick, a dispatcher would be called back to fill the vacant position(s), thereby keeping the staffing level safely at 6 PSDs.

As of the May 8th 2014 reduction in staffing, on Friday and Saturday nights, during the evening shift - our reported busiest time - the staffing can now drop down to 5 PSDs, from 6. Also, the overnight shift on Friday and Saturday nights has gone down to 5 PSDs, where again we use to have 6 during the busiest part of that shift – 11p-3a - and with busiest time of the year approaching, summertime. With the bar closings at 2am, each Friday and Saturday night the downtown area is packed with people, and call volume usually increases.

There are also public events such as Alive at Five, Jazz up July, the balloon parade and other events that bring **thousands** of extra people to the downtown area, creating an increase in call volume for the call takers, and the radio dispatchers. Yet, the number of PSDs stays the same – just 5.
This is the same level of staffing that the Stamford Police Department Communications division had in 1978. Population has risen (102,453 in 1980), call volume has increased, and officer productivity has increased greatly in the past **36** years.

To sum up what we are saying, there can be just 2 PSD call-takers on duty during some shifts; and with breaks, as few as 1.

When at minimum staffing, our two 15-minute contractual breaks per shift allow for there being just 1 PSD answering calls, for a combined 1 hour for the shift. And when you combine all PSD breaks, you have a floor staff of 4 PSDs for 2.5 hours for that shift. I can tell you that it is a very dangerous situation.

We answer 911 calls, as well as routine calls for police and fire services; we also handle miscellaneous calls such as transferring people to different parts of the police and fire departments - front desk, jail, records room, specialty units, I.D. bureau, domestic violence, detective bureau, Fire Marshals, various fire stations, and others. We also handle callbacks to the callers, alarm companies, tow trucks, public works, tree crews, Animal Control, CL&P, Cablevision, the water company, Yankee Gas, other area police departments, and more. We take messages for on-duty officers in reference to calls they have handled, or additional information needed by the officer. We have the new SARA system installed in the schools, for quick reporting of an active shooter situation, which is a good idea, but by default, makes the call volume to go up because parents will call us looking for answers.

The 911 line is our priority - Life and death emergencies first, then all others. When you answer a 911 line you don't know what will be happening on the other end. It may be a call for a medical emergency, a mildly sick person, traumatic injury, difficulty breathing, choking, not breathing, heart attack, allergic reaction, motor vehicle accident - with or without injuries, drowning, hanging, or someone who just dropped dead!
State-mandated Emergency Medical Dispatching (EMD) means we spend much more time on medical calls now, gathering additional information for the responding units, checking for scene safety, giving pre-arrival instructions, doing CPR, talking someone through the Heimlich

maneuver, or delivering babies if needed, and sometimes having to do it through an interpreter. The liability factor means there is zero tolerance for mistakes when doing EMD. Yet, the whole time this is happening, the other phones are still ringing, and ringing. But you cannot abandon the 911 call that you are on to answer another line.

We also have police emergency 911 calls such as shots fired, homicides, suicides, assaults in progress, domestic disputes, robberies in progress, banks robberies, shopliftings in progress, or psychiatric patients. In these instances we must gather important information such as descriptions of persons or vehicles, if weapons were involved and more. Again, other phones are ringing but you cannot abandon that call you are on, as you have to gather as much information as possible for responding officers heading into a very dangerous situation. Many times the situation is so volatile that you MUST stay on the phone until the officers arrive, updating them along the way, or asking further questions that the officers may have from the road. ...and the other phones keep on ringing

We answer 911 fire related calls for structure fires, vehicle fires, chemical spills, gas leaks, wires down, and more. Fires, a car accident, a disabled vehicle, lights that go out, a traffic signal that's malfunctioning are just a few examples of the types of incidents that could generate multiple calls. You name it, and we have handled it. We are the first people in the emergency response process. We are the public's first contact.

We enter approximately 400 calls per day into the CAD system. Those are the calls that are typed up, not calls *answered.* We answer more than double the amount of calls that are typed. This is not an easy task with just 2 call takers...nearly impossible with just 1 call taker!

We prioritize calls, answering 911 lines before routine lines, but sometimes it's so busy even 911 calls go unanswered. Sometimes a 911 line rings just once. Whether it is an abandoned call, or one that we were unable to get to, it requires a call back in order to determine if there is an actual problem. When there aren't enough PSDs answering the phones, those unanswered/abandoned calls can sit for quite some time before anyone has the opportunity to call them back. Many times we find out there was a true emergency - an emergency for which help has now been delayed.

We have complained and voiced our opinions on this matter to no avail. 'Budget restraints' are what we are told. The public have repeatedly voiced their frustrations to us about unanswered calls. We empathize with the public. We are frustrated too, over a situation that is beyond our control. Imagine calling 911 and NO ONE answered.

On one occasion a Stamford resident called 911 twice because a family member was having difficulty breathing, yet there was no answer because there were just two call-takers on duty, one call taker was on a break, and the lone call-taker was on another 911 call. The caller was forced to drive their family member to the hospital them self.

What happens if they were speeding through town and their family member stops breathing? What happens if they were speeding through town and, in their attempt to help this person, they get into an accident or hit someone crossing the street - then what?

What if you're only able to dial 911 once because you're in distress, having an asthma attack, a heart attack, or being assaulted, or you are a victim of a home invasion or robbery ...and no one answers?

We have had several medical calls for service from C-Med that went unanswered and had to be relayed over the fire radio, including a request for service on the Merritt Parkway for a Motor Vehicle accident with injuries. We have had a call from the nurse at Westhill High School for someone having an anxiety attack and difficulty breathing that went unanswered. There were only 2 PSDs answering phones that day, both were busy with other emergency calls. The nurse finally got through on a routine line.
With everything that is happening at schools across our state, and our country, those 911 calls should not go unanswered, ever. Who is going to explain to the parents that a call for help was delayed or unanswered due to under-staffing?
Who is going to explain to someone that, during an active shooter call, the shooter had a 5 minute head start and was able to kill an extra 20 people, including their family member, because there were only 1 or 2 PSDs answering phones at that time, and both were tied up on other 911 calls, so no one answered the call about the shooter? Have we put a price on life in the City of Stamford?

The job is stressful enough without having to be understaffed. Sometimes you have to hold off on taking your break for several hours, just so you can help your fellow employee, by not leaving them alone during a busy period. And often is the case where it is so busy you'd like to not take your break, but you NEED to take your breaks. Those breaks afford us an opportunity to use the facilities, give our minds a rest, or allow us enough time to microwave some food, so that between calls we can eat our meals at our work consoles. Yes, this is the job we signed up for, but not to work understaffed. When a call taker takes a break, leaving 1 call taker on the phones, and a 911 line rings and is going unanswered, the backup police dispatcher, if not already busy with motor vehicle stops, is expected to walk across the room and answer that 911 call, thereby leaving the police radios with just one dispatcher. With each officer required to do a certain amount of motor vehicle stops and location checks per shift, I can tell you the police radios are way too busy to be manned by just one dispatcher.

This brings up officer safety issues. The police department has a minimum street staffing of 18 officers. That does not include extra officers assigned to any 'Click it or Ticket' or DUI details, Narcotics cars, the Traffic Enforcement units, the Marine Division, Detective Bureau units, and various others. There are shifts when all of the aforementioned extra units are working at the same time, and at times only 1 dispatcher to handle them.
The officers deserve better, the public deserves better. There was a time when we had 3 PSDs on the police radio, this way there was never a time when a person working the radio didn't have a back-up. But that too fell to 'budgetary restraints'.

You're not just dispatching calls. You're also sending officers back-up, typing motor-vehicle stops, programmed patrols, running motor vehicle listings, registration and license checks, warrant checks, Prawn checks, motorists with weapons permits and firearms registered to them, making phone calls as needed, maintaining the towed vehicle database, and more. It's not a 1 person job.
The radio system we have allows multiple officers to communicate with us at the same time on multiple channels.
Unfortunately the nature of the job makes the officer-to-dispatcher ratio uneven at best. From a PSD perspective it's one dispatcher to a *minimum* of 18 officers. The officers' perspective is one

officer to one dispatcher. When it's busy and the officers are stopping cars or making requests, as if they were the only officer on the road, it can get close to being impossible for a single person to keep up with it all, and get it all right. Officer safety decreases greatly from a dispatch aspect when there is 1 person on the police radio. The answer to this problem would be to put the staffing level back at 6 dispatchers.

The 911 Communications Center is staffed and operated by professionals, just as the police and fire departments are. With the proper staffing and training it runs very efficiently.
But to let the staffing levels fall for the department, and to let the per-shift floor staffing levels fall, leaves you with dispatchers that are stressed out, not burnt out, and human errors will occur.

Every emergency call starts with the Public Safety Dispatcher. Our uniformed services, as well as the citizens of The City of Stamford, deserve a well-trained and well-staffed 911 Communications Center. Unfortunately, that is not what they are getting.
When things don't go well, who is to blame? We know who *gets* the blame. It's the Public Safety Dispatcher. The morale in this department has not been this low in a very long time, and it's a shame.
A lot of people talk about our job without knowing what exactly goes on in a 911 center. And who suffers? The citizens of Stamford, that's who. It's unfortunate that most of the citizens have no idea just how understaffed the dispatch center is. I think they would be appalled to know the truth.
No one wants one of their family members' calls for help to go unanswered, or be delayed for the lack of staffing.

This is our job, and this is the city some of us grew up in, and we are very proud of both.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

The Stamford Public Safety Dispatchers
UAW Local 2377