**BRANDNER2410.mp3**

[00:00:16] **Speaker 1** A legislative hearing at the Capitol this week focused on staffing shortages in law enforcement, looking at county jurisdictions in particular. One place staffing shortages are being felt acutely across the state in 911 emergency call centers among dispatchers. What has led to the shortages and what can be done about it? We turn to Columbia County Sheriff Roger Brandner, who testified at the capitol. Sheriff, thanks very much for being here.

[00:00:44] **Speaker 2** You're welcome, glad to be here.

[00:00:46] **Speaker 1** So describe the shortage of dispatchers in your county.

[00:00:51] **Speaker 2** Yeah, I think we're consistent with the rest of the 901 PSAP dispatch centers across the state. There's been a struggle to get qualified dispatchers in the door and get them trained. In our county, we're four short. We've been four to five short for just over a year and a half, which is a great strain on the other dedicated dispatchers that are currently there.

[00:01:14] **Speaker 1** Yeah, indeed. Now, I read that the pay is between about $50,000 and $70,000 a year. Why is it hard to fill or retain these positions? Is it that the pay cannot make up for the stress of the job?

[00:01:29] **Speaker 2** I think it's a combination of both. You know, most dispatchers around the area are going to be making around that $25, $26 an hour, you know, which is not a bad paying job, but you're working nights, weekends, holidays. It's not Monday through Friday shift work. These are long hours, very stressful. You know if you can just imagine, you know taking that call from that mom whose young child is not breathing or. From a car accident or a domestic sexual assault. There's a lot of stressful calls and these dispatchers are the ones that answer that call to get the first responders to that scene.

[00:02:13] **Speaker 1** And so with a shortage, in addition to that, they're working a lot of overtime hours.

[00:02:20] **Speaker 2** Oh, absolutely. Uh, I know dispatch centers across the state that have contract with other dispatch centers. Um, I don't know one county where the sheriff is actually dispatching at night because they're so short. Our dispatchers are working a lot of overtime. It's not nothing for them to work 20 extra hours in addition to their 40 hours a week.

[00:02:40] **Speaker 1** What does a shortage of dispatchers mean for emergency response in your community and others?

[00:02:48] **Speaker 2** Yeah, we've been able to backfill it with our dedicated men and women in our dispatch center. But the fear across the state and in our county, especially is when they burn out and they leave and we get any shorter, uh, we're gonna struggle with having someone answer that call for service when someone calls for that immediate need of fire EMS or law enforcement. You know, we need a proper timely response. We need a trained dispatcher to gather all the adequate information to get the right first responders there. And if they're tired, if they are calling in sick, if we don't have the staff to sit in that dispatch center, there is going to be a delay in first responder services, which is a public safety issue.

[00:03:33] **Speaker 1** So how frightening for you is that as the lead law enforcement official in your county to be worrying about emergency response times?

[00:03:45] **Speaker 2** Oh, it's critical. This has been our number one focus in our county for about the last year. There's no question there's a shortage of qualified law enforcement officers that work the street. Our jailers in our County jails, many County jail are not at full staff. But our dispatch center, they have to be there. They have to answer that call for service. They just have to. We have to have someone sitting in those chairs and there cannot be a delay. Seconds truly make a difference when you're calling for assistance.

[00:04:23] **Speaker 1** What are some of the solutions being looked at?

[00:04:27] **Speaker 2** Well, in our county specifically, we really did a adjustment of pay. We did some premium incentives for working at night and on weekends. We have done some other financial type of incentives. So if you're here a year, three years, five years, you get a bonus. We have changed the hours. One unique thing with us is we just consolidated the Wisconsin Dells Police Department Dispatch Center. Which, you know, was about a million dollar project, and we had to increase our space up there, our dispatch stations, the equipment, update them. So that was a big project, you now, because Wisconsin Dells area is busy in the summertime especially, but you know actually all 12 months out of the year now, so we've given them more help. We've increased, you no, some of the little things up there as crazy as it sounds, we got them a treadmill. Uh... We started some yoga classes here we do a lot of stress management uh... With helping them cope uh... What the stress of taking these calls because our dispatchers work twelve hours a shift and that's a long time to be sitting there and they don't get the opportunity like so many other workers to get up and walk around to move around to leave the station and go get fresh air outside they have to stay close to that radio at any given second that emergency could happen.

[00:05:53] **Speaker 1** What a hard job. Sheriff Roger Brandner, thanks very much.

[00:05:58] **Speaker 2** You're welcome. Thank you.

[00:06:06] **Speaker 1** Someday, not that they need the distraction, but we'd love to come take a look at what that job is like.

[00:06:16] **Speaker 2** Oh, you're absolutely welcome. We've got our local media here. We can get you up in that dispatch center and it's, it's really interesting. We have five stations. It's like an air traffic controller out there. Oh, they have so many screens to look at. Yeah, absolutely.

[00:06:30] **Speaker 1** Well, thank you for your time on this today. It's really important.

[00:06:34] **Speaker 2** Absolutely, thank you for the time. Appreciate it.

[00:06:36] **Speaker 1** Okay, bye.