

March 3, 2015

RECEIVED

Sheriff Chris Hoffman
205 Bedford Street Suite G
Hamilton, MT 59840

MAR 03 2015

Ravalli County Commissioners



Dear Sheriff Hoffman,

I am respectfully writing to you today in an attempt to address the concerns I have for the Ravalli County 911 Dispatch Center. As you know, in the last year, the 911 center has lost hundreds of years in experience as many dispatchers have resigned their positions.

Dispatchers are working a mandatory 48 weeks, and that can quickly rise with one person calling in sick. These excessive hours in conjunction with a high stress career is causing a huge burn out rate. Dispatchers are more prone to illness and mental fatigue from continual excessive hours of work. Over working dispatchers, coupled with the high stress associated with the job, makes illness and mental fatigue even more likely. Mistakes are made more frequently due to exhaustion. In addition to being understaffed and over-worked with basic dispatch duties, dispatch is further burdened by the additional work of warrant and protection order entries and validations. The working conditions in the Ravalli County 911 Center are something out of the history books! The dispatchers are exhausted! These people are human, not robots. It becomes extremely difficult to keep morale up when the dispatchers are being worked to death, yet their administration doesn't even work a 40hr week, but they sure are getting paid for it.

The Ravalli County Dispatch Center is down to only 5 dispatchers and 1 active trainee. Trainees are being pushed through the training process and being forced to second partner dispatch before they are fully trained and ready. There are no longer even enough trained dispatchers to help train anybody that may be hired. It takes at LEAST 6 months for a dispatcher to be good enough to be on their own. After losing another dispatcher Monday, the schedule currently in the works will require 1 person to work from 1500-1900 on their own. Normally this is the busiest time of the day. Dispatch was barely keeping their heads above water with 2 dispatchers working a shift. Gone are the days, where 1 dispatcher can work alone. This county has grown far too big and is far too busy for such staffing. This is not only a HUGE officer safety issue, but also a HUGE public safety issue. Frankly as a citizen, I am terrified that I or anybody I love or care about, should have an emergency in this county right now.

Zae Hudson prides himself on things that he personally considers successes, such as attending the all valley fire meetings and starting a burn permit program, but the dispatch center is in shambles. This issue gets swept under the rug and ignored continuously no matter how many dispatchers quit. What does it take for red flags to start going up? Does somebody have to get seriously hurt or killed?

Lt. Zae Hudson refuses to learn the dispatch job, which would tremendously help the center, seeing that the center is dangerously understaffed. Seeing that Lt. Hudson is not trained in dispatch, it makes absolutely no sense that he should be writing our SOP's (again, he doesn't know what we do.)

I would like to further address the Steve Kent management model that has been implemented into the Ravalli County Sheriff's Office. Lt. Zae Hudson has used this management model to his advantage by memorizing what he needs to say to get him out of the hot seat. We as a team have tried to hold him accountable for his actions, or lack of, and he simply ignores us. Whatever happened to the 90% employee satisfaction rate? Whatever happened to holding our superiors accountable? Are those not part of Steve Kent's Model? There has been no attempt made to even hear our side of the story. It's all good and well that Lt. Zae Hudson preaches the words of Steve Kent, but those words mean absolutely nothing without being backed by actions. I believe the Steve Kent management model is being misused by Lt. Zae Hudson and I think Mr. Kent would be absolutely disgusted to know that his model is being used in this manner.

The Ravalli County 911 Center is in crisis and I am asking you to please address this issue before someone gets hurt. Those guys out on the street became my family. They deserve to have a dispatcher who is trained and knows what they are doing. I fear for their safety as well as the safety of our community. One dispatcher cannot possibly dispatch all resources needed in a major event, provide 911 support to the caller, answer radio traffic from city, county, fire, and EMS, and in some cases notify MHP, Life Flight Etc. It just is not possible!

I want you to know that I absolutely loved my job and I miss it more than you will ever know. However, I could never return under the current administration in the 911 Center. Many of us dispatchers put our heart and soul into our jobs. Some of us were able to put up with the rough working conditions longer than others, hoping that things would get better. When they continued to get worse, and our voices weren't being heard, we gave up. I feel that the Ravalli County 911 Dispatch Center has some major administration issues that need to be resolved. Several dispatchers have made attempts through their chain of command; me included, to bring forth these issues in hopes that there would be some kind of resolution. The dispatchers' voices have NOT been heard and we have been referred to as "dead weight" or "those who refuse to conform to the new administrable ways." This in most cases, can't be further from the truth. People just don't quit something they love to do. We all have dedicated many hours of our work and personal lives into serving our community and our law enforcement partners. We deserve a better working environment.

Please realize that I'm not writing this letter to upset you and I hope that you take my concerns to heart. I can now write this letter because I no longer work for the Sheriff's Dept and am no longer afraid of losing my job for standing up and saying something. I realize that after reading this harsh reality, you may never want me to return to your dispatch center for work. I am okay with that. I am seeking some kind of resolution for the people who are still working down there, the officers and our community. You will continue to lose people and won't ever retain good experienced dispatchers if something doesn't change, and change fast. Public safety is a serious issue and not an area that should have a high turnover rate and people unsatisfactorily trained.

Sheriff this issue can no longer be swept under the rug and ignored. Doing so is extremely unethical and goes against the oath you have sworn to uphold.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katelyn Lester". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katelyn Lester

605 N. 6th Street

Hamilton, Mt 59840

262-902-6084

CC: Ravalli County Commissioners
Ravalli County Human Resource Director