



From Hire to Retire: Winning the Battle on Dispatcher turnover

**Mandi Montalvo
Elk Grove Police
Department**

This session will cover:

Practical strategies to improve recruitment and retention in 911 dispatch centers. Learn how to attract the right candidates, support new hires, and build a workplace culture that keeps top talent.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Understand the main challenges and opportunities in recruiting qualified dispatchers
- Learn practical strategies to improve retention through better onboarding, culture, and support
- Develop a plan to apply these strategies in your own dispatch center

The Staffing Challenge

- National Dispatcher Shortage
- High Turnover and Burnout
- Staffing Impacts performance, morale, and public safety

Recruiting the Right People

- Target traits, not just resumes
- Use realistic job previews (sit alongs, videos)
- Market the *mission*, not just the job

Faster, Smarter Hiring

- Simplify applications and testing
- Shorten time-to-hire
- Keep applicants engaged

Onboarding that retains

- Structured onboarding = lower early attrition
- Peer mentors and check ins
- Culture of support and inclusion

Culture is Everything

- Respect, recognition, and transparency
- Help dispatchers feel valued
- Open leadership and team communication

Mental Health & Wellness

- Access to mental health resources
- CISM, peer support, and flexible scheduling
- Normalize taking care of self

Career Growth Matters

- Promote from within
- Lateral roles and leadership training
- Help staff see a *future*, not just a job

Learn from Turnover

- Exit interviews and regular pulse checks
- Act on feedback
- Celebrate what is working

Innovative approaches

- Shift bidding, hybrid roles, extra days off
- Community partnerships
- Wellness stipends or recognition programs

Reaching Retirement

- How does everything we have talked about today play a role?
- Bring retirement into the discussion early in their career.
- Provide every opportunity for success

Career phases

- Help staff see the long game
- Years 0-2 : Survival & Skill Building
- Years 3-10 : Growth & Confidence
- Years 10-20: Mastery & Mentorship
- Years 20+ : Legacy & Leadership

Call to Action

- Start small: One change, one shift
- Build trust, value people
- Be the center they don't want to leave

Conclusions

- What you are doing matters! Keep going even when it is hard!
- Some changes will need financial support, but many cost only time and effort.



Questions?