

# Stamford Volunteer Fire Company, Inc.

142 Stebbins Lane  
Stamford, VT 05352

## Prepared Statement

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From: Paul Ethier, Fire Chief (stamfordchief@gmail.com)

To: Senate Committee on Government Operations

Regarding: EMS Issues in Vermont, specifically training requirements for volunteers.

Good afternoon,

My name is Paul Ethier I'm the Fire Chief in Stamford Vermont, population 820 people. I've been Chief of this department for 22 years and a member 35 years.

It's no secret that the lack of volunteers is hurting both fire and EMS services in Vermont.

Today, I'd like to talk specifically about fire department based Emergency Medical Services. Our fire department has been responding to medical emergencies since 1982. The services we provide include CPR/AED, basic life support, bleeding control, stabilize fractures, Glucose, Narcan and oxygen.

Thirty five years ago when I first started all of our members were trained to respond to medical emergencies. Everything I just named was covered in the training with the exception of Narcan and AED. The training was 16 hours and taught locally by EMTs with 4 hours of refresher training each year. It was a glorified first aid class and was the standard by which all police officers and firefighters in Massachusetts were trained, there was no Vermont standard at the time. This training was short and sweet and to the point and everyone took it.

Fast forward thirty five years and we now have only eight first responders trained to respond to medical emergencies. What happened? In Vermont you now need to be trained to the emergency medical responder level to provide patient care. This is now the lowest level of EMS training required to respond to medical emergencies. The Emergency Medical Responder level requires almost 60 hours of training. Classes are often held regionally and for anyone that lives in Stamford, this means traveling 45-60 minutes to get to classes, 2-3 hours of class and then travel 45-60 minutes to get home. Once you complete the course you then have to travel to a regional practical exam and then to a testing center to take a written exam, the closest testing center to us I believe is Albany, NY. Once certified you need 8 hours of refresher training each year. The result, volunteers started saying that's too much and stopped taking the training and stopped responding to medical emergencies. In addition, the Fire Department itself is also now required to hold a license per VT EMS rule 5.1, to provide this service. Part of having this license requires the head of service to attend district meetings where nothing discussed is related fire based first responders.

When I look at the future of EMS in Vermont I see paid EMTs and Paramedics providing exceptional pre-hospital care but what I also see is rural patients waiting 30-45 minutes for this care because the State has left the local volunteer first responders behind, by requiring too many hours of training. If the state of Vermont was to recognize a lower level of training and support it and each community only added two additional responders you could add almost 600 new medical first responders, overnight, at little to no additional cost.

In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts each and every firefighter and police officer receives advanced first aid medical training in addition to CPR/AED. Classes are taught locally by EMTs at no cost to the student. They are required to complete refresher training every three years. These first responders are then automatically part of a tiered response system where local responders respond to medical emergencies and are then supplemented with higher levels of responders such as EMTs and Paramedics that respond with ambulances. This facilitates a quick response to life threatening emergencies and ultimately ends with Paramedic ambulances providing the highest level of pre-hospital care available.

In 2013 Vermont said they were going to fight the opioid crisis and made Narcan available to the public and first responders and the result has been fewer people are dying from overdoses. In Stamford, in the past two years, we have saved two people from certain death. The first was an opioid overdose. Our local responders responded quickly, administered Narcan and save the patient's life before EMTs and Paramedics arrived on the scene. The second was a traumatic cardiac arrest. Our local responders were able to respond quickly and start CPR and regain a pulse before the EMTs and Paramedics arrived on the scene. You don't need to be an EMT, EMT or Paramedic to save a life.

I encourage the state take the first aid training already provided at the Police and Fire Academies and make that the new entry level EMS training and put more first responders on the road, lower response times and operate a tiered emergency medical response system. Not every firefighter wants to be an EMT, EMT or Paramedic but every firefighter can save a life with the basic life saving skills they've already been taught at the Fire Academy.

Make Vermont volunteer friendly.