

April 16,
2021

Senate Government Operations,

Thank you for continuing to be our advocate for EMS. The last year has been a challenging and exciting time to be in EMS. The roller-coaster of preparation, response and added community responsibility has tested and stressed our system. We have identified system weaknesses and strengths as we have adapted to this public health challenge. Yesterday we had an association meeting, an opportunity for administrators to reflect on the challenges facing Vermont EMS. The availability of EMS providers to attract and retain staff dominated the conversation. The unfortunate reality is that this is not an easy problem to solve. The legislation that was passed last session is actively being implemented, removing administrative burdens and creating an access level for local first responders. It was universally agreed that the reimbursement reform is needed for any long-term improvement.

1. **We need long term funding and reimbursement reform.** The pandemic has underscored how financially fragile our system is.
 - a. Most services operate at a loss as a result of state and federal underpayments. These state and federal underpayments are balanced with fundraising and local tax contributions. When we use municipal tax dollars in place of underpaid Medicaid claims we lose the federal match.
 - b. A long-term solution needs to be developed that removes the connection between transport to the Emergency Department and reimbursement
2. **We need to continue to support EMS workforce development.**
 - a. During the past year, \$900,000 in state appropriated funds were used for tuition vouchers for EMS programs. Though extremely successful, given the timing and gathering limits, these programs failed to maintain the 2019 levels of EMS work force with another 100 providers dropping off this year. Some of these programs are ongoing with completion dates in the next several months. Without funding, very few programs are scheduled to start in the next six months.
 - b. We need an affordable way to educate paramedics in Vermont. The cost of the VTC paramedic program is beyond excessive. With funding provided last year, we created a voucher program that provided \$18,000 in state aid for each paramedic student. Unfortunately, the remaining student liability as a result of program costs and fees is more than the entire cost of equivalent programs in other states. This program is almost three times the cost of other equivalent programs.
 - c. We are currently developing the Vermont Responder program. This program will lead to improved community response but will need funding to support the roll out.

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d. Last calendar year we lost almost 20% of our instructors. We are currently developing a new program for Instructor Coordinators in Vermont and have not had an instructor program in years.

e. Due to the critical need for paramedic providers, we recommend a state supported relocation program.

f. As a result of underpayment, many in our EMS workforce are making **less than \$15 an hour**, working multiple jobs and in many cases more than 60 hours a week to cover the cost of living in Vermont. EMS professionals deserve a livable wage.

g. The pandemic response has also highlighted a need for additional critical care providers in our system. With only a couple dozen state-wide, this resource is constantly in short supply.

Paramedic Training Grants	\$540,000, 30 students at \$18,000 each
AEMT training	\$150,000, 100 students at \$1,500 each
EMT training	\$300,000, 300 students at \$1,000 each
First Responder training	\$150,000, 300 students at \$500 each
Instructor training	\$45,000, 30 students at \$1,500 each
Critical Care Training	\$50,000, 10 students at \$5,000 each

Please consider the education request of \$1,230,000 as an annual need to maintain the current workforce based on the current annual attrition. This does not correct the current understaffing that we know exists throughout the state.

I also request that you consider an appropriation for wage support for our EMS workforce in the short term. Much like the hazard payments in the last year this will help maintain some of the workforce as we recover from the pandemic and develop long term solutions.

Many of Vermont's EMS services are not operated by municipal governments, please consider state supported infrastructure grant to non-profit EMS. Chronic underfunding has left many services in need of HVAC and living space upgrades to make safe workspaces.

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Chief, Rescue Inc