



## **Ensuring Access to Outstanding Emergency Care for Texans: Texas EMS Alliance's Priorities in the 2017 Texas Legislature**

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies are a vital part of every community. EMS providers are the only segment of the health care delivery system designed to respond to the location of a patient suffering from an acute onset of illness or a traumatic injury, provide patients with initial care on scene, and provide timely access to a specialized segment of the health care system, such as a trauma hospital or stroke center.

### **Texas EMS Assistance Program: Appropriate Funding for All EMS Agencies and Rural Education**

Rep. J.D. Sheffield introduced HB 1407 to create the Texas EMS Assistance Program, which would create a dedicated account for Local Project Grants (LPGs) and develop a distance-learning EMS professional education program to ensure that rural communities have EMS services.

It is a common misconception that ambulance transportation is a free and essential public service in which the cost is completely covered by local taxes, like police and fire. EMS agencies generally rely on four different revenue sources to cover operational costs (local taxes, patient and commercial insurance payments, government grants, and donations).

LPGs are a lifeline for many urban and rural EMS agencies in Texas because of the resources that they provide to EMS agencies. LPGs fund equipment, injury-prevention projects, and continuing education for EMS professionals to ensure that these communities have access to 9-1-1 services. The bill would create a dedicated funding account for LPGs.

Similar to other segments of the health care industry, EMS agencies are facing a serious shortage of EMS professionals in rural areas. This shortage is due to two primary factors: EMS training is not available in rural areas and rural agencies are not able to pay as well as urban agencies.

EMS professionals often indicate that they either had to move away from their community to undergo the training or it was not available at convenient hours. To help alleviate this problem, the bill would create distance-learning programs for individuals in rural areas so that they do not have to quit their day jobs.

### **Protecting the EMS Agency's Ability to Bill a Patient**

EMS agencies must cover their costs to operate 9-1-1 services in a community. They derive the majority of their revenue from patient bills for services and local taxes. If the 85<sup>th</sup> Legislature creates obstacles for EMS agencies to balance bill a patient, many communities will be forced to raise local taxes in order to recover the lost revenue for EMS service.

EMS agencies make every attempt possible to go in network with a commercial health insurance plan. However, EMS agencies often find that commercial health insurance plans are either unwilling to add the EMS agency to the network or the network rates are so low that they do not cover the cost. Therefore, the EMS agency may have to bill the patient for the transport.

### **Fuel Tax Relief**

The 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature provided fuel tax relief to non-profit EMS agencies (HB 2731) by amending it to another bill that was signed into law. HB 1332 (Rep. Tan Parker) in the 85<sup>th</sup> Legislature would go one step further and offer fuel tax relief to all entities that offer 9-1-1 services to Texas communities (HB 3468 from the 84<sup>th</sup> Legislature).