

May 27, 2020

Governor Greg Abbott
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711-2428

Re: Request for EMS Agency Relief

Governor Abbott:

I am writing on behalf of the Texas EMS Alliance, a statewide organization of EMS providers created in 2015 to serve as the voice for EMS agencies of all sizes and provider types. As first responders, we stand ready every day to answer every call for help from the citizens we protect, but today, our members are the ones asking for help.

EMS agencies in Texas are struggling financially due to the COVID-19 pandemic: Operating costs are increasing at a dramatic rate while revenues are experiencing serious decreases. Yet we remain on the front line by serving our communities and helping the sick, injured and infirmed. We are looking to our state leadership for temporary relief to see us through this public health emergency (PHE) and help keep us able to respond and save lives.

The combination of increased costs for personal protective equipment (PPE) and the need to use it many times each day is an obvious and easily understood additional expense for EMS agencies, as every 911 patient must be considered a COVID-positive patient. The state has done a remarkable job locating and providing PPE for EMS agencies, but we are still purchasing an enormous amount of these supplies on our own. Additionally, the economic shut-down has caused decreases in available equipment and supplies leading to higher costs and longer lead times to obtain critical inventory needed to continue to treat our patients. Less obvious is the effect that the increased time for decontamination of personnel and vehicles after each call is having. Complete deep-cleaning of the ambulance after every transport means each response ties up an ambulance twice as long as it would have before the PHE, thereby reducing ambulance availability and increasing our operating costs significantly.

EMS revenue that is necessary to pay for these additional costs is also down significantly. A recent statewide survey of EMS agencies across Texas revealed that 91 percent are facing financial struggles as a result of the pandemic. The revenue challenge is that EMS is only paid if we transport a patient. Transports have declined due to stay-at-home directives, fewer elective medical procedures and the public's fear of going to the hospital. This is coupled with an ever-increasing uninsured and unfunded population due to rapidly rising unemployment.

Every EMS agency relies heavily on reimbursements from Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance payers to ensure there are enough ambulances to serve their communities. EMS agencies cannot furlough employees and still maintain an appropriate response system for their communities. Something must be done.

It is a common misconception that EMS providers were included in the federal government's initial CARES Act; they were not. The second federal aid package only directed less than 0.5 percent to EMS, and the statute in the CARES

Act required any funding to go toward lost revenue and expenses; however, it is only a fraction of the lost revenue and increased expenses our industry has incurred due to the pandemic.

We are requesting your help to temporarily increase the Medicaid rate for EMS transports to the Medicare rate, to help see EMS agencies through this PHE. Additionally, we are asking for Texas Medicaid to grant temporary waivers so that care provided on scene by EMS, when a Medicaid recipient is not transported to the hospital from a 911 call, can also be reimbursed. We are asking that both of these requests be retroactive to the date of the original state-wide Declaration of the PHE and that they both expire when this declaration is lifted or expires. These critical steps will help maintain the EMS infrastructure in Texas and allow us to continue to respond to those in need in our local communities.

Governor Abbott, we thank you for always having a sympathetic ear for Texas first responders. Perhaps now more than ever, we need your help to ensure that Texas EMS agencies can continue to serve Texas communities. We appreciate your consideration of this important request.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Mincy".

Jeff Mincy
President
Texas EMS Alliance

cc: Phil Wilson, Acting Executive Commissioner – HHSC
Nim Kidd, Chief – Texas Division of Emergency Management