

Members of the Committee, thank you for being here today and for the opportunity to speak with you. My name is John K. Chlpka, and I am Council President at Jackson Center Borough. My purpose here today is to relate some issues regarding ambulance service in our community and also in neighboring areas.

We are a community of about 200 residents, many of them elderly, and numerous others involved in agriculture. We have no heavy industry to speak of, and operate on a very limited budget.

When one decides to live in areas such as ours, certain concessions are automatically taken into account. A trip to the grocery store or for gas is 10 miles, and ambulance responses are not comparable to what they are in larger, more urban areas.

In the not too distant past we have actually had two different companies have stations in our general area, Life Force and Superior. While this was a comfort, it was rather short lived as both companies had to make the business decision that it was not profitable to maintain these stations. Our primary provider, Superior, has been able to still maintain coverage, but response times are getting longer and longer. I must stress that this not the fault of Superior, but rather the same set of circumstances in which we all find ourselves.

Recruitment and retention is extremely difficult for these services. Long hours, constant tragedy, and a pay rate that does not compete with other businesses are keeping qualified candidates away. There does seem to be a trend in society today where many younger people simply do not want to work for a living. My experience as a retired 911 Shift Supervisor has proven that even competitive wages and an indoor work environment are not enough to attract employees. The same is true across all first responder groups. I do not have a solution.

There has been the formation of an EMS task force comprised of twenty-two surrounding communities tasked with reviewing this issue. We have met numerous times over the past months, including invaluable guidance and insight from Representative Bonner, and have held discussions on possible solutions.

Raising millage in our areas and dedicating the funds specifically to EMS has been examined at length, but the results have been far less than desired. Most of our neighbors also have limited tax bases, with residents struggling in the current economy. Raising two mills in Jackson Center would only amount to several hundred dollars. More symbolic than helpful.

There is also an attitude among many residents against giving public funds to a private entity, even one as critical as this. I have met this resistance in my own Borough, and have no explanation for it. The issue is not yet resolved, though, as we are currently creating next year's budget, so it has to remain to be seen.

Based on information from Mr. Doug Dick, owner of Superior, another large issue is lack of reimbursements for services rendered. Insurance companies refusing to pay, out of state

drivers injured here on our interstates, and Medicaid paying minimal fees are resulting in providers carrying a large amount of uncollectible debt. Perhaps requiring ambulance coverage on policies or some other act is in order. Again, this is another aspect over which we have no control.

It is also worth mentioning that not so long ago the only training needed for ambulance duty was a valid driver's license and a first aid card. While that is not optimal for severe emergencies, it is something to consider for minor incidents where a patient can be bandaged and transported without the need for Advanced Life Support. As our situation worsens, this is going to be the case for many of us, in that it will be quicker to perform basic first aid and transport our loved ones ourselves. It will not matter how well equipped the ambulance is that is responding if you expire before it arrives.

Superior's coverage area is also expanding into neighboring counties, not by their choice but due to shortages in other locations. So this issue is not confined to Mercer County alone, but is a state wide issue.

The only logical resolution will have to come from our County and State governments. Whether that involves funding for additional staff, or funding for volunteer companies with a Quick Response Service, or other adjustments to the rules, it is simply outside of our capabilities to help ourselves.

This does not mean that we are powerless.

Jackson Center Council, for example, is putting together a plan to educate our residents and prepare them for emergencies. We are looking to schedule a "Stop the Bleed" course, as well as CPR training.

We feel that with this knowledge our citizens will have a good chance of performing appropriate first aid in critical circumstances while awaiting responders.

Another aspect of our education plan is to advise people of the realities of how 911 and the emergency system works. In my experience there is an expectation among people that an ambulance should be on scene within minutes of being called. Providing real world information will help dispel that.

As a final point, the other area we are considering is 911 for kids. Many of the calls I took in my career were from children who were the only other person at home with the patient. It is important that they know what to expect when they make that call.

So while the situation is not hopeless at this point, we are truly approaching the time when an ambulance simply will not be available when that call is made. Being proactive at this point has the potential to ward off tragedy.

Thank you for your time.

John K. Chlpka

