

Testimony in Support of House Bill 1152

Pennsylvania House of Representatives

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Good morning, Chairman, members of the Committee, and Representative Cooper.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of House Bill 1152 and, more importantly, to discuss an issue that directly impacts the future of emergency medical services throughout Pennsylvania.

I serve as the Chief Operating Officer and EMS Chief of Mutual Aid Ambulance Service. I have the responsibility of helping ensure that our organization has the personnel, equipment, training, and financial resources necessary to provide emergency medical care to the communities we serve.

I can tell you that one of the greatest challenges facing EMS today is not our ability to provide quality patient care. It is our ability to financially sustain the system that makes that care possible.

Every day, EMS agencies across Pennsylvania are expected to be ready to respond to emergencies 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

That readiness comes at a significant cost.

We must recruit and retain qualified EMTs, AEMTs, paramedics and PHRNs, provide competitive wages and benefits, purchase and maintain increasingly expensive ambulances and medical equipment, and continually invest in education and training.

These expenses exist whether we respond to one emergency or twenty. Yet our reimbursement system largely pays us only when we transport a patient.

We are expected to maintain a system of constant readiness, but we are not consistently reimbursed for the true cost of maintaining that system.

And that is where the problem begins.

Unlike many other healthcare providers, EMS agencies cannot control when patients need our services. We cannot schedule emergencies, choose which calls to answer, or decide whether responding makes financial sense.

When someone calls 911 because they are having a heart attack, experiencing a stroke, or suffering a serious injury, we respond immediately.

We don't ask what insurance they have. We don't ask whether the reimbursement will cover our expenses. We simply respond because that is our responsibility and our commitment to the communities we serve.

Unfortunately, the financial realities of providing those services are becoming increasingly difficult.

Insurance reimbursement has not kept pace with the growing costs of personnel, equipment, medical supplies, and operating an emergency ambulance service.

And while EMS agencies continue to look for efficiencies, improve operations, and manage expenses responsibly, there is only so much we can do when reimbursement does not adequately reflect the cost of providing care.

This is why House Bill 1152 is so important.

The bill has earned bipartisan support from 60 legislative co-sponsors. That support demonstrates that legislators across party lines recognize the challenges facing EMS and understand the need for this legislation to help sustain emergency medical services in our communities.

Representative Cooper's legislation recognizes that emergency medical services are an essential component of Pennsylvania's healthcare and public safety systems.

By establishing a reimbursement structure tied to Medicare rates for 911 emergency medical services, the legislation provides a more predictable framework for payment from commercial insurers.

It also recognizes the importance of direct and timely reimbursement to the EMS agencies providing the care.

This legislation is not about creating a financial windfall for ambulance services. It is about creating a more sustainable financial foundation for the future of EMS.

At Mutual Aid Ambulance Service, we understand that operating a successful EMS system involves much more than simply staffing an ambulance.

It requires dispatch and communications, quality assurance, clinical oversight, continuing education, vehicle maintenance, equipment replacement, and administrative support.

All these components are necessary to ensure that when someone calls 911, a properly staffed and equipped ambulance is available to respond.

And those costs continue to increase.

We also need to recognize the impact this financial pressure has on our EMS professionals.

Our EMTs and paramedics are highly trained healthcare providers who make critical decisions in uncontrolled environments, often under extremely stressful circumstances.

They deserve competitive compensation, professional development opportunities, and a stable organization in which to build their careers.

Without adequate reimbursement, EMS agencies face difficult decisions about staffing, wages, equipment replacement, and maintaining the level of service their communities expect.

And when an EMS agency is forced to reduce services or close its doors, the need for emergency medical care does not disappear.

That responsibility shifts to neighboring agencies, potentially increasing response times and placing additional financial and operational pressure on an already strained system.

This is not simply an issue affecting ambulance companies.

It is an issue affecting every Pennsylvania resident who depends on the 911 system during a medical emergency.

House Bill 1152 will not solve every challenge facing EMS. We still need to address workforce shortages, Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement, and the overall cost of maintaining emergency medical readiness.

However, this legislation represents an important opportunity to address a significant part of the problem.

Representative Cooper, I want to personally thank you for recognizing the challenges facing emergency medical services and for your willingness to introduce legislation that addresses the financial sustainability of our profession.

Members of the Committee, I respectfully ask for your support of House Bill 1152.

The people of Pennsylvania expect, and deserve, a reliable emergency medical services system.

But we cannot continue to expect EMS agencies to provide an increasingly expensive level of service without ensuring that the reimbursement system supports the cost of delivering that care.

When someone calls 911, they should never have to wonder whether an ambulance will be available. And EMS agencies should not have to wonder whether they can financially afford to answer that call.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your support of Pennsylvania's emergency medical services.