

Testimony of Art Martynuska, Executive Director of Cambria County Emergency Management and 9-1-1 before the Health and Human Services Committee

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chair and members of the Committee for allowing me this opportunity to present on this very important public safety issue.

I am Art Martynuska currently I have the honor and privilege to serve as the Executive Director of the Cambria County Emergency Management Agency and Cambria County 9-1-1.

I have been involved with emergency services as both a volunteer and career fire fighter and paramedic since 1976. I retired as an assistant chief with the Johnstown Fire Department and I also served as President of the Pennsylvania Professional Fire Fighters Association. I am in my first term on the Board of Directors with the Southern Alleghenies EMS Council.

I am here today to address a true public safety emergency; Emergency Medical Services in Pennsylvania is in critical condition. The lack of staff and the overload of what staff is still responding has become unsustainable. The residents and visitors we have sworn to serve are suffering.

In Cambria County where I serve, the amount of available EMS resources has declined by 73% since 1997, while our population has only decreased by 19%. Our 9-1-1 Center answers over 220,000 calls per year or one about every 4 minutes. There are times when our EMS resources are so depleted that we have to move units from their normal coverage areas to get them into stranded resources areas.

In the past years we have lost the following EMS units, Ashville, Beaverdale, Belmont, Conemaugh, Cover Hill, Dale, Dunlo, East Ambulance, East Taylor, Ferndale, Franklin, Gallitzin, Ideal, Lilly, Lorain, Loretto Menoher Heights, Oakland, Patton, Reade Township, Scalp Level, Solomon Run, with other services consolidating or downsizing we have gone from 74 units to 22 available today. In addition to we have lost eight medic assist units down to one for the entire county. Currently, there is only one volunteer ambulance service in Cambria County.

The strain put on our valiant EMTs and paramedics was exacerbated by something that none of us have ever experienced, COVID 19. The toll, not only in lives lost, but also career burnout of emergency response personnel is clearly evident. Our already beleaguered EMS system was put through the wringer by a pandemic that would have strained even the strongest response organizations.

What is needed is not punitive actions over minutia or brow beating of responders and services but restorative actions. All first responders know that they are held to a higher level. We have to have the public trust. When a person picks up the phone and dials 9-1-1 it is usually because they do not want to make that call, they have to.

EMS in Pennsylvania does not suffer fools, we are a profession that practices the highest level of care for the public. Day in and day out Pennsylvania's EMTs and paramedics answer the call. Not one first responder that I have ever encountered in my years of service has ever sought recognition for the job they signed up for, but I can assure you that they did not sign up to be kicked in the stomach from a bureaucracy that seems bent on being punitive.

I approach this August assembly today to beseech you to help your first responders. We can not have EMS services that are fighting for their survival against all of the challenges that they face today and their own state governing authorities. The last recourse for an ambulance service in Pennsylvania should not have to go to court to legitimize their existence.

We hear a lot of talk and a lot of funds are expended on recruitment and retention. Do we put our money where our mouths are? We need to support emergency services. Fining first responders for infractions and taking money from struggling services will not answer that question.

Something I learned many years ago, punitive is not always positive.

I stand ready to assist my Commonwealth in this or any other areas that will be positive for first responders.

Thank you for allow me to address you today.