

Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Public Hearing Testimony

June 6th, 2023

Thank you all for your time and attention focusing on EMS in Pennsylvania. As you are well aware, EMS is in a fragile state right now and your help and support are more important now than ever before. I have been a Paramedic responding to emergencies in Pennsylvania for the past 32 years. I have watched more and more EMT's, and Paramedics leave our system and fewer than ever people are coming into the system to actually respond to calls for help. Services are going out of business consistently across the commonwealth. Available human resources being one of the most significant reasons for this loss. Career, Volunteer, and combination EMS agencies alike, we are all suffering. Earlier this year, Governor Shapiro signed an executive order to streamline the licensing process for workers coming into Pennsylvania. This was to reduce barriers and get much needed help into the workforce in a variety of fields. Currently at EMS West, there are 14 applications for certification by reciprocity that are waiting for action from the Bureau of EMS. Of those 14 applications, all of them exceed the requirements for a timely response. Some of those being two or three months. In my own case, United States Airforce airman Chelsea Goepfert, who is a certified EMT coming to Ross/West View EMS from New Mexico took almost 4 months to get through a background check process. The reason for the delay was the desire to see the original background check document so the investigator could inspect the paper for folds and staple marks. Ultimately after support from both EMS West and Ross/West View EMS Staff, the Bureau accepted the same PDF document they refused several months earlier. This is just one example of unnecessary delays in bringing badly needed people into our EMS System. There is another DOD person currently waiting for certification with the same reason for the delay.

It was proposed recently that the funding model for the regional EMS councils be modified in such a manner that would be devastating to the regional councils and subsequently the providers who rely on them. Fortunately, the current contract was extended one more year so that change is delayed. If the proposed change is revisited next year, the regional councils would have to submit receipts for reimbursement after the expense has been incurred. This would limit the ability of the regional council to enter into loans, lines of credit, contracts, leases and more. Further, there is no thought on where the money would come from to pay the bills up front or completely if the expense was denied by the Bureau. The new funding model would reduce the ability of the regional councils to provide services to the EMS community that are vitally important. Training, testing, safety initiatives and more would all suffer.

If the Regional Councils go away, it would be crippling to the EMS system. The EMS act directs the Bureau of EMS to work with and through the councils for local issues and feedback from services and providers. By circumventing the regional council, support to the EMS system would be eliminated subsequently causing challenges for EMS agencies and providers. Currently services and providers rely on our regional councils to support service and vehicle licensing, Urban and rural EMR, EMT and Paramedic education programs, community education, emergency disaster preparedness, recruitment and retention efforts, stakeholder feedback into the EMS system and more.

Some of the regional projects that EMS West has managed, Seat belt safety initiatives, emergency vehicle driver development training, driving safety, clinical excellence, Carbon Monoxide meters on every house bag in every licensed ambulance which has undoubtedly saved lives of our responders and patients, leadership training programs, bleeding control programs and more.

When the current posture of the bureau of EMS became strong handed and disciplinarian, we began to hear more and more stories of actions being taken against providers without input from service directors, service medical directors, regional medical directors, or the regional councils. Please understand, my colleagues and I completely support the need for the enforcement of rules and regulations. Let me say that again. We completely support the need for enforcement of rules and regulations. The manner in which we decide to enforce them is the contentious issue here. No EMT or Paramedic should be investigated or sanctioned without involvement from the service director, medical director, and regional council. If discipline and sanctions are appropriate, it should always include root cause analysis and remediation of the provider, so they receive the support that they need to succeed and not make that same mistake again. We expect our people to make split-second decisions under completely stressful situations. It is critically important that we promote a system that supports self-reporting, the desire for improvements and excellence and involvement from all of the right stakeholders with the best interest of the patient and provider at the forefront. A vast majority of people in EMS are in EMS to help people. Our system is full of good people with one or two bad apples. Not the other way around and should be managed in support of those good people. Unfortunately, 14 hours after WPXI in Pittsburgh aired a story discussing this, a statewide attack on the regional councils was waged by an anonymous email account coming from paemsincrisis@proton.me. Proton is a system specifically designed to protect the identity of the sender of the information. Unfortunately whoever sent those emails did so using protected data out of the Pennsylvania EMS registry system. Our providers entrust us to protect their information. In this case, it is inappropriate to use that system and our providers contact information. That does not breed trust in our system.

Our time is limited so I will stop my comments there. I am so appreciative of the opportunity to speak with you all and speak on behalf of the great people I work with and work for.

Respectfully submitted,
Gregory Porter