

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and Members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee

My name is Renée Gray. I am the Service Chief of a small ambulance service in rural Washington County that provides EMS to the towns of Jonesport and Beals Island. I am an Advanced-EMT, and have served in EMS both professionally and locally as a paid volunteer for 24 years. I am also currently the Town Administrator and Town Clerk for Lubec, which is my full-time job. Over the years, I have seen the dynamics of EMS change dramatically. It used to be that ambulances were staffed with volunteers. Such examples would be someone might leave their job, if able, to respond to a call, or a retired individual may have some free time and just wanted to help out their community. Or perhaps an individual was in a situation where their spouse worked, which enabled more time for the other spouse to volunteer. With enough of these types of people, there was always someone available to answer the call of someone in need. In more recent years, the retirement age has been extended, meaning people work longer as they age. Times call for all parties of a household to work to provide income. Volunteerism is a thing of the past. EMS requirements have also changed. It's no longer just a short class in which you come out with a certificate in your hand that says you can transport and provide care to a patient. A basic EMT class is now 150 hours and is a 7 credit college course. This class requires a lot of dedicated time, an individual's willingness to learn, accept life saving responsibilities, all for what? Little to no pay? Once an EMT achieves licensure, they then must continually train to keep their certification current. All this requires a lot of time and dedication. Fewer and fewer people sign up to do all this work. They simply can't afford to do it for nothing anymore. We lose staff to better jobs, with better opportunities, such as secure income, secure work hours, perhaps health insurance or other benefits. When we lose good EMTs or Paramedics to minimum wage jobs, that's a problem. Now we have other problems, the people that have remained to shoulder the burden are getting burned out. People aren't as available for EMS anymore, and schedules go unfilled, which means an ambulance service goes out of service in our town. This adds strain to other neighboring EMS services. Response times could increase 45 minutes to an hour from the time an individual calls 911, to when an ambulance arrives at their door. We may want to put a new sign up at the county border - "Washington County, pass at your own risk".

The people in Washington County are already overtaxed. Municipalities, schools, and county taxes are always on the rise. All on the backs of taxpayers, in towns that have little to no industry. The state values our land based on our beautiful, scenic coastline which attracts tourists, retirees, and second homeowners. No factories, no mills, few small businesses, and little to no tax base other than property taxes. Medicare and Mainecare insurance reimbursement rates are a joke when they will only pay you 70% of their allowance. That revenue stream is not dependable, especially when they will deny a claim for any reason; making operating on shoestring budgets even more strenuous. We lose money each time the ambulance rolls out of the door to respond to someone in need. Small ambulance services are just as important as larger ones. Even though we may only respond to 300 calls per year, we have to be equally trained to be able to respond to those calls, just as urban EMS does. Six years ago, the nursing home in Jonesport closed its doors after existing for over 40 years. That was a major source of revenue for the ambulance service, gone. The covid crisis added so much more burden to the already fragile EMS system in Washington County. Some crew were concerned for the safety of their families and just said it wasn't worth the risk anymore. These people aren't easily replaced, when it takes about a year to educate and prepare a new EMT. So many people say they could never do the job we do. Let me ask, could you? Would you? Why don't you? Perhaps you have - why don't you anymore? For the few that have remained, and for all those we need to attract to EMS, we need more funding to help us offer better, attractive wages, health and other benefits. Insurance claims aren't enough for small, rural services. The towns are already overstrained. We need permanent funding sources, similar to state aid subsidies to schools, to be able to attract and retain new EMS personnel. Our communities and the lives of our loved ones depend on it. Thank you for your time and attention on this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Renée Gray Moosabec Ambulance Service Chief
Advanced-EMT

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