

LD 969: STATEMENT FROM HARPSWELL NECK FIRE AND RESCUE

March 25, 2025

Frederick Harvey Pough and Scott Cammarn

Harpswell Neck Fire and Rescue is a small, rural, volunteer department. Like many volunteer fire and rescue departments, HNFR has a small pool of potential volunteers and consequently we have difficulty training licensed EMS providers. We currently have four Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) ranging in age from 63 to 83 who provide 24-hour coverage 7 days a week. We urgently need additional EMTs to reduce the burden on our current responders and to replace those who age out.

Courses for EMS volunteers must be offered at times and places that fit the schedules of individuals who have full-time jobs and family responsibilities: They must meet at night and in locations that are accessible.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

We have volunteers who wish to become EMTs, but two components of the licensing process are barriers to that goal: (1) unavailability of classes for volunteers and (2) unreasonably restrictive requirements for individuals who have existing medical qualifications.

1. AVAILABILITY OF CLASSES.

The training center structure for licensing EMS clinical providers was established in 2010 and includes two for-profit ambulance services and the community colleges.

- Only one of the for-profit ambulance services is actively marketing training classes, and those classes are taught at only four locations, which are not readily accessible from many parts of the state.
- Maine EMS relied on the community college system as the primary licensing venue for EMS providers, seemingly with little consideration of the needs of volunteer departments.
 - Community colleges are not conveniently located for many departments. For example, the Southern Maine Community College's Brunswick Campus is close to Harpswell, but the SMCC Main Campus – where EMS classes are usually offered – is an hour away.
 - While SMCC's EMS Clinical Coordinator, Don Sheets (formerly a Maine EMS employee) is aware of the hurdles facing volunteers and personally strives to address the problem, his concern does not seem to be widely shared among the other community colleges.¹ We understand that community colleges

¹ Don Sheets has agreed to offer a night EMT course in Brunswick in fall 2025. We appreciate this commitment, which addresses our immediate need. However, the long-term problem remains

have competing priorities but without their participation EMS training is not readily accessible to volunteers.

2. REQUIREMENTS FOR APPLICANTS WITH EXISTING MEDICAL QUALIFICATIONS.

Maine EMS currently makes little or no provision for applicants who have medical qualifications. In the past year two nurses, both with experience in emergency medicine, and an MD who is a specialist in pediatric emergency medicine have expressed interest in volunteering with HNFR. These three individuals would nearly have doubled our EMT roster, but they withdrew when they learned that they would have to undergo the same 14-week training program required for laymen.

These problems are not restricted to HNFR—they exist statewide and if they are not addressed it seems likely that areas of Maine will soon have material gaps in EMS coverage like the incident in Macwahoc described in the attached news item from WABI TV.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that Maine EMS and the Maine legislature re-examine the training center and EMS licensing processes to ensure that that these processes are well-suited to the large number of volunteer EMS providers on which Maine residents rely so heavily.

In particular:

1. Maine EMS should encourage the certification as training centers of municipalities and other community entities that can provide high-quality training at locations that are accessible to volunteers.
2. Maine EMS should create alternative licensing process for persons with existing medical licenses.
3. If Maine EMS continues to rely on community colleges as the primary training centers in Maine, Maine EMS and the Maine legislature should ensure that the community colleges are incentivized to train volunteers.
 - a. Funding should be provided to the community colleges to ensure that they are offering training that is accessible to volunteers—that is, courses at night, each semester, and at widespread locations.
 - b. Attracting instructors to lead these training courses has been difficult for community colleges and funding should be provided for this purpose.
4. Maine EMS should periodically re-assess all of its training centers to ensure that they are adopting creative solutions to encourage the training of volunteer EMS providers.
5. To the extent legal changes are required to achieve these objectives, the Maine legislature should enact legislation.

Frederick Harvey Pough, a retired Professor of biology from Cornell University, has been an Emergency Medical Technician with HNFR for 11 years and Rescue Chief for the past 6 years.

Scott Cammarn has been an EMT with HNFR since 2024 and is Senior Counsel with Pierce Atwood LLP, a law firm based in Portland. He is providing this testimony solely in his personal capacity; the views expressed are not necessarily those of HNFR or Pierce Atwood. He apologizes for being unable to attend this hearing in person due to prior work obligations.

EMS crisis in Maine exposes worst case scenario for rural residents



By WABI News Desk

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BANGOR, Maine (WABI) - When people dial 9-1-1 for an emergency, they expect help to come.

However, with increasing demand and decreasing resources and staff, not every call can be reached.

“We have cases that are happening all over the state of Maine where there’s delays in EMS response and we even have cases where callers are being told by 9-1-1 dispatchers that ‘I don’t have an ambulance immediately available,’” said Rick Petrie, special projects adviser for Atlantic Partners EMS.

That was the case in Macwahoc recently when an emergency call went out.

After going through multiple municipalities and being told nobody was available to respond, a non-profit EMS company out of Hudson made it there after traveling over an hour after finishing another call.

By the time help arrived, it was too late. The patient was dead.

<https://www.wabi.tv/2025/01/09/ems-crisis-maine-exposes-worst-case-scenario-rural-residents/>

“A town or a political subdivision could in fact not have a plan in place,” said Petrie.

As of right now, they’re not required to.

The last legislature passed a law that declared E-M-S an essential service, however nobody is held accountable under the law.

Departments can refuse to respond to calls if they’re tied up and there’s no contract in place for the town to pay for those services.

All while the cost of one ambulance trip has skyrocketed.

“The legislation and the federal government has made the cost of operating ambulances skyrocket because they keep making more rules,” said Rick Bronson, town manager of Lincoln.

Petrie said this isn’t a matter that’s easy on EMS staff.

“EMS services everyday agonize over what do we need to be able to do to respond because that is what drives us,” said Petrie.

This matter is also in the hands of the general public.

While there’s no law in Maine requiring municipalities to provide EMS services to communities, it can change.

“You should be standing up at your town council meetings or whatever meetings are going on and bang on the table and say what is our plan for emergency medical response,” said Petrie.

Republican Representative Tracy Quint of Hodgdon released a statement on the passing of the patient:

“Maine’s rural EMS System is in crisis,” said Rep. Tracy Quint (R-Hodgdon). “My heart goes out to the family involved and countless others affected by the strain on our rural EMS services. My legislative colleagues and I are committed to addressing this tragedy. I have reached out to the family and join them in praying that another family will not have to experience such a devastating loss.”

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