

Sonnie Shepherd
Sullivan, ME
LD 526

The Honorable Suzanne Salisbury,

I am writing to urge you to do all you can to see to the passage of LD 536, which promises to provide an emergency subsidy to help all currently licensed EMS transporting services, with an emphasis on rural EMS services, and to support further legislation asking for subsidies for non-transporting services and sustainable funding for all.

I first became familiar with the EMS crisis in rural Washington County when I was contacted by Moosabec Ambulance Service Chief Renee Gray, asking for our station's help in getting the word out about how dire the EMS situation was and is. In the year and a half since that call, I've watched in awe as a handful of dedicated volunteers and providers work for next to nothing to bring a critical service to the people of Washington County. It's a story that rings true across our state. In Dennysville, an elderly couple has kept that service going for 54 years but is now aging out and begging for others to fill the role. In Machias, Petit Manan Ambulance Service just folded - no longer able to sustain itself with a lack of funding.

The scenario repeats itself over and over, and it IS, ultimately, about money. People can no longer afford to volunteer their time as they once did. We all know inflation has affected the cost of food, heating, transportation, and other necessities. Apart from the hours and miles these service providers put in (we all know how spread out our rural counties are and how much territory must be covered), virtually all of them also have full time jobs. For every run, Medicare reimburses a fraction of the cost. What other business could sustain itself under those conditions?

EMS providers have hidden their distress and carried the system on their backs for far too long. The time has come to support these tireless heroes who stand ready at a moment's notice to pull victims from a car crash, perform CPR on the way to a hospital, put their lives on the line during the COVID pandemic, and rescue those who have overdosed on drugs - all without judgment or fear. Imagine the emotional toll alone - much less knowing such a heroic job is put on the back burner financially. We all, at some point, could need their service and they will be there. It's past time for us to be there for them.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sonnie Shepherd, News Director
Star 97.7 Radio
Ellsworth, ME