

October 7, 2021

Dear Members of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Hollidaysburg American Legion Ambulance regarding Senate Bill 698.

My name is Jessica Sorge I am the EMS Chief and Executive Director of Hollidaysburg American Legion Ambulance. (HALAS) I have held the position of EMS Chief for two years and am challenged and excited to be serving my community in this capacity.

HALAS is one of the oldest EMS services in the State of Pennsylvania. Our humble beginnings were a result of increased commerce in our small borough of Hollidaysburg, which was at the time, and still holds the title of the County Seat. In 1939, War Veterans took notice to the fact that emergency services were needed as a response to the increase of motor vehicle traffic into and out of the Borough. HALAS quickly became a well-organized veteran staffed medical response team. Throughout the years, HALAS held the title of several firsts in our county. We were one of the first licensed EMS services in the state, one of the first to employ a full-time female paramedic, the first to staff a 24-7 ALS response unit and started the first county PSAP. HALAS employs 70 eager and professional young men and women, consisting of EMT's, Paramedics, trained Non-emergency Van Operators, and an in-house billing staff. We cover approximately 215 square miles of urban, suburban, and agricultural /rural land. We serve the County Courthouse and the County Airport as well as many industries, and 3 school districts. HALAS staffs three stations 24/7 ALS crews with a supervisor. Our fleet consist of nine ALS ambulances, one QRS Unit, and one paramedic chase vehicle. We work on a healthy budget yearly and hold the support of many municipalities.

EMS faces many challenges in today's world. We are no longer solely volunteer services, many have broken off of their fire company based beginnings and are facing staffing issues. The main challenge that HALAS faces today is lower insurance reimbursements, direct payments to patients and predatory neighboring EMS systems. Fortunately, our EMS has been able to find creative ways of finding revenue and remain a vibrant EMS service.

SB 698 was instantly a source of concern for HALAS, upon our investigation of the bill. Unfortunately, HALAS is not the only EMS service in Blair County. We are bordered by an Authority named AMED. Both services commit the same resources to their respective municipalities, but in the not so distant past, AMED has postured themselves to become a county wide EMS Service. They began their forceful intrusion into a municipality that contained a very large medical facility that HALAS had a contractual agreement with for 32 years. Sadly because the law makes provisions for the township to name a primary EMS service, HALAS was pushed out of that township without notice, created by corrupt business agreements. Even though our station location was less than two-tenths of a mile from that facility, and the medical facility voiced significant concerns about losing their longstanding relationship with HALAS, the decision stood. I refer to this situation because even though the intention of this law was "intended" for good, the devil was in the details. Prior municipal codes and SR 6 did not intend for townships to elect and choose their EMS provider based on who their friends were, in fact, the

exclamation of the Buddy Box Alarm system was highly discouraged but that did not stop HALAS from being pushed out in this situation. Intentions are rarely upheld, and corrupt politics and personal agendas frequently take over. It only takes a poor leader to make a decision that will change the landscape of the county sometimes permanently.

The intention of SB 698 is to help services maintain their ability to deliver good healthcare to the community and support their operating expenses with revenues that are generated through taxation. Generating a County Safety Authority is not a one size fits all bill, in fact we feel that this bill was tailored to a few situations, and that it will ultimately spell disaster to smaller EMS services like HALAS. SB 698 does not come right out and say that smaller services will be shut down, what it does spell out is if the service controls much of the county, they could petition the county to create a Public Safety Authority. This would allow municipalities to shut out smaller private, volunteer, and non-profit services, and eliminate competition completely – legally. Creating legislation that creates a situation that employs a single provider in the county does not increase health and safety like the intention of this bill proclaims. In fact, HALAS believes that eliminating competition will significantly decrease the health and safety of the community there would be no reason to improve and compete when you are the only “game in town”. As we constantly observe, creating a medical monopoly decreases / eliminates competition, drives up medical prices and operational costs, and decreases patient care and response times.

Here are a few areas of question and concern regarding SB 698.

1. Why are we placing a percentage of the population (51%) and percentage of municipalities (40%) to automatically place a service in the position to become the heir apparent to the county?
2. If the county creates an authority, is it possible for the county to create two regional authorities and adjust revenues for both, or is it a sole provider?
3. SB698 creates a very large tax increase, this burdens the citizens with not only their medical costs but also a tax increase. It is our understanding that in addition to the new tax levied on the constituents, they would still be responsible for their medical bills.
4. Where does the smaller service fit into the equation?

If SB 698 is enacted as written, 70 families will be impacted, and one of the oldest EMS services will be legally forced out of business. Please take into consideration our recommendations to this bill.

1. Eliminate the section outlined on page 4, line 4-9. This prohibits a service from gaining authority status because of a percentage.
2. Make provisions to fairly divide funding that is created by the municipalities to support EMS services. There is already legal provisions for EMS to receive a portion of the taxes levied on citizens at the local, municipal level. Why create a county responsibility?
3. The Commonwealth prides itself on being able to allow the local government to decide on the health and well being of their individual community. This bill wears away at the ability for these smaller communities to make decisions that fit their needs. It is anti free market and despite what the municipal authority operators might promise, the enactment of this legislation would probably result in longer response time and increased taxes.

In Conclusion,

We agree and, it is only fair that EMS receives monetary contribution from the community in which they serve. Fortunately, this has already been provided in SR 6 (Emergency Service Laws, outlined in the Statutory Responsibilities by Form of Government, Appendix 1) SB 698 will put smaller services at an unfair disadvantage. HALAS is very worried about this piece of legislation, and we would hope that the reason behind this bill is to enhance and support EMS, not place us at a disadvantage as the bill implies. We also understand that good intentions that are not clothed in reason lead to greater disasters than those actions built on ill will or stupidity. The intent of this bill is not to shut down services but is sure makes it easy for this type of situation to happen. This as previously stated, is not a one size fits all bill. HALAS wants to continue to be a servant to the community and to continue its legacy for another 100 years. We want to ensure a level playing field and not be legislated out of business.

Respectfully Submitted

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