



Testimony

Public Hearing Senate Bill 698

Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency

Preparedness Committee

October 12, 2021

Chairman Stefano, Chairwoman Muth and members of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, thank you for this opportunity to come before you today to discuss Senate Bill 698. I would also like to acknowledge Senators Baker and Kearney for pursuing this endeavor.

My name is Donald DeReamus, and I am a Board Member and Legislative Chair of the Ambulance Association of Pennsylvania (AAP). I am senior management, a paramedic and tactical paramedic for Suburban EMS that services nineteen municipalities in Monroe and Northampton Counties. Accompanying me today is Heather Sharar, Executive Director of the AAP.

The AAP supports Senate Bill 698 as a promising opportunity to deploy the municipal authority model on a countywide basis. While we support the bill, allow us to make two comments raised by the EMS community:

- While the AAP supports the legislation, some member EMS agencies have expressed concern that a county using the authority model may attempt to supplant their existing service.

However, the decision of a designated EMS service for each municipality will remain with the local municipality.

- This bill grandfathers existing municipal authorities but restricts future authorities to a county only. Should a county decide not to utilize this model, the threshold of 51% of population or 40% of total number of municipalities may be too high a ceiling to allow the formation of a municipality driven joint public safety authority. We would like to see the language that restricts future authorities to a county amended to preserve the existing ability of local municipalities to form an authority while creating this same ability at the county level. We feel that both of these abilities are critical tools in the efforts to fix the EMS funding issues that are crippling our ability to serve our residents.

This bill needs to move out of Committee for the reasons stated below:

The Covid-19 Pandemic - We are still in a pandemic that has stressed our workforce and budgets. We are losing our staff to pandemic-related burnout and low wages requiring greater dependence on those workers who have remained. Our increased daily operational costs persist while our reimbursement remains below cost.

The Workforce Shortage – Talk to any EMS Agency director and you will hear, we have no staff. A recent NBC News report [EMS services warn of 'crippling labor shortage' undermining 911 system \(nbcnews.com\)](#) By [Phil McCausland](#) opens with “The pandemic-induced [shortage of emergency medical technicians and paramedics](#) nationwide is so dire that ambulance service providers warn of sharp cuts to services and longer waits for 911 calls — even when it’s a matter of life or death.” This is Pennsylvania TODAY!

Pandemic Relief – Unlike the hospitals who received millions, EMS has received no relief for the extreme financial losses seen in 2020. EMS Agency budgets are always tight and while call volume has increased, revenue has failed to meet expectations even with a limited return to normalcy.

Hazard Pay – EMS received no grant funding for “hazard pay.” EMS was and remains the true frontline of this pandemic.

In conclusion, as we stated in the opening, Senate Bill 698 is a promising opportunity to help EMS. We are steadily approaching the last half of this Session while time is running out on the EMS System in this Commonwealth.

