

2019 EMS ON THE HILL DAY

Talking Points

Funding the Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) Law

Last year, the SIREN Act was passed by both Houses of Congress as part of the [Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018](#), and signed into law on December 20, 2018.

This law creates a grant program for public and non-profit EMS agencies in rural areas, many of which are at the forefront of the opioid epidemic—to support recruitment, retention, education, and equipment for EMS personnel specifically in rural areas.

The SIREN Act was originally introduced by Senator Dick Durbin and Senator Pat Roberts (R-KS) in the Senate, and Congressman Greg Gianforte (R-MT) and David Loebsack (D-IA) in the House.

Please urge your House and Senate lawmakers to support a funding level at \$30 million for 2020 to adequately fund the SIREN Act and help those agencies that need it most.

H.R. 1309, the Workplace Violence Prevention for Health Care and Social Service Workers Act

Introduced by Congressman Joe Courtney (CT-2), this bill would mandate the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to create a national standard requiring health care and social service employers, including EMS agencies, to develop and implement a comprehensive workplace violence prevention plan.

EMS practitioners face a disproportionate amount of violence at work, and the data shows that these incidents are on the rise. Health care workers, including EMS practitioners show up every day to improve their patients' health and well-being. However, they face an outsized risk of on-the-job violence, according to Department of Labor data. Reports indicate that violence--most often from patients and those accompanying them--results in injury, loss of productivity, and pose serious safety concerns.

H.R. 1309:

- Addresses an epidemic of violence against healthcare and social service workers;
- Requires OSHA to create a federal workplace violence prevention standard which mandates employers to develop comprehensive, workplace-specific plans to prevent violence before it happens;
- Sets a quick timeline on implementation to ensure timely protection for healthcare workers;
- Sets minimum requirements for the standard and for employers' workplace violence prevention plans.

Please ask your House lawmaker to support H.R.1309 to help end violence against our EMS workforce.

H.R. 1646, the Helping Emergency Responders Overcome (HERO) Act of 2019

Introduced by Congressman Ami Bera (D-CA), this bill would provide resources to increase recognition and treatment of PTS for EMS practitioners and firefighters, provide grants to establish and assist peer-to-peer support programs, and collect data on EMS practitioner and firefighter suicides.

Emergency medical responders and firefighters routinely eyewitness scenes of catastrophic incidents involving severe injuries, tragic loss of human life and property loss. The cumulative effects of these exposures on emergency personnel may result in psychological injuries and even suicides. Studies confirm that rates of PTS within this workforce are comparable to other high-stress occupations such as law enforcement officers and military combat veterans. The Helping Emergency Responders Overcome (HERO) Act would help address this workforce challenge by identifying best practices to identify, prevent and treat PTS among EMS practitioners and firefighters.

Specifically, the Act will:

- Establish a grant program to provide peer-support services for EMS practitioners and firefighters.
- Require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop resources for mental health professionals to better understand the culture of these professions, and identify evidence-based therapies for mental health issues common to public safety officers.
- Direct the Centers for Disease Control to collect data on suicides among public safety officers.

Currently, this bill addresses the needs of EMS practitioners and firefighters working for public or non-profit agencies. It does not cover all 911 emergency responders.

Please ask your House lawmaker to support H.R. 1646 for all 911 emergency responders.

H.R. 1241, the Volunteer Responder Incentive Protection Act (VRIPA)

Introduced by Congressman John Larsen (D-CT) and Congressman Mike Kelly (R-PA), this bill would bolster volunteer EMS and fire recruitment and retention by allowing volunteers to receive nominal incentives like property tax deductions and up to \$600 per year of other types of benefits like stipends or uniforms without having to pay federal tax on them.

State and local governments use property tax rebates and other incentives to recruit and retain volunteer EMS and firefighters. The Internal Revenue Service views these incentives as taxable income. A previous federal law only provided up to \$360 per year in tax deductions for other state and local benefits. This law expired at the end of 2010.

H.R. 1241 would permanently reinstate these tax benefits that expired in 2010 and raise the cap from \$360 to \$600.

Please ask your House lawmaker to support H.R. 1241 to bolster retention and recruitment for our much-needed volunteer workforce.

Congressional EMS Caucus

New Chairs, Congresswoman Debbie Dingell (D-MI) and Congressman Richard Hudson (R-NC), are now leading the EMS Caucus. This caucus is a bipartisan effort to promote the role of EMS in our communities through policies that:

- improve the ability of agencies and practitioners to provide life-saving emergent, urgent and preventive medical care;
- promote EMS integration within federal agencies with jurisdiction over EMS;
- encourage cost savings in care management in both emergent and non-emergent situations; and
- support appropriate preparedness for natural or man-made disasters and tactical response 24/7.

The EMS Caucus provides a platform to promote, educate, and increase awareness around the federal policy issues impacting EMS and serves as a resource for policy questions.

Please ask your House lawmaker to join the EMS Caucus. For those House representatives that are current members of the Caucus, please thank them for their support.

The Impact of Drug Shortages on EMS Patients

Emergency medical services (EMS) agencies, emergency departments, and hospitals across the United States are currently severely restricting use of IV fluids, pain medications, anti-nausea medications, sedatives, and airway management medications. Without urgent intervention, we are concerned that these restrictions will lead to rationing and, ultimately, to complete lack of availability of essential emergency medications (EEM).

Please prioritize solving the drug shortage problem for those patients most at risk by examining novel ways to reimburse ambulance agencies and hospitals to facilitate a market-based solution that ensures a stable, sufficient, and redundant supply of these essential medications for the protection of public health.