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Written Testimony for the Record

FY2026

**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,
and Related Agencies**
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Thank you, Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. My name is Chris Way, and I am the President of the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT). I am also the Fire Chief of Kootenai County Fire and Rescue in Post Falls, Idaho, and have served as an emergency response professional for more than 30 years. During that time, I served first as an EMT-Basic, then as an EMT-Intermediate, and I am now a licensed paramedic as well as a certified Firefighter. Because of my service in these positions, as well as other special assignments at the state and local level, I have significant experience with EMS operations, personnel management, emergency response planning, and other aspects of EMS, and I understand the needs of EMS. I want to thank you for your ongoing support of the EMS workforce.

Founded in 1975 and over 110,000 members strong, NAEMT represents our nation's frontline EMS practitioners, including Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) and Paramedics, who provide critical, lifesaving services to communities nationwide, especially in rural, frontier, and other hard-to-reach areas. EMS is a distinct and essential service to the public and a fundamental component of our nation's healthcare and emergency response systems. I appreciate the opportunity to offer NAEMT's views as the Subcommittee formulates its FY2026 bill. As you focus on our nation's many priorities, I ask that you provide robust funding for the Rural Emergency Medical Services Training and Equipment Assistance grant program, also known as the SIREN grant program.

This year, NAEMT is celebrating its 50th anniversary. That's 50 years representing individuals who work in all sectors of EMS, including government service agencies, fire departments, hospital-based ambulance services, private companies, industrial and special operations settings, and in the military. EMS professionals also work in hospitals, clinics and other healthcare settings in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal communities. In recent years, EMS has faced unprecedented challenges. In the wake of exponential increases in expenses for medical supplies, equipment, fuel, and medications, even the most well-resourced EMS agencies and fire departments across the United States are struggling to stretch their budgets to maintain their operations. Many are also facing crisis-level challenges in recruiting and retaining personnel, fueled in part by low unemployment and an incredibly competitive labor market.

These challenges are especially acute in small towns, farming communities, and frontier areas, where rural EMS agencies are a lifeline to the healthcare system for residents, who on average are older, have higher rates of chronic illness, and lower incomes. Rural EMS agencies often are forced to rely on community donations to supplement limited funding from municipal or county governments. While these donations help rural EMS agencies and fire departments maintain their operations, they have not kept pace with the rising costs that these agencies face.

In many communities, EMS agencies have been forced to close their doors completely. Coupled with declines in primary care and hospital service availability, greater distances between healthcare facilities, low reimbursement rates, and the ongoing opioid and fentanyl crisis, these circumstances have created a perfect storm of financial challenges for rural EMS agencies.

SIREN grants have provided much-needed funding to assist rural EMS agencies in procuring medication and medical supplies, recruiting and retaining personnel, increasing service levels from Basic Life Support to Advanced Life Support, and even replacing older ambulances with newer and safer models. Since the inception of the program in 2018, 170 awards ranging from \$92,000 to \$200,000 have been made to rural communities. The funds have been used to maintain, improve, or expand the level of emergency medical care provided to the residents of those communities – activities that were only possible with the support from SIREN grants.

I am grateful to this Subcommittee for providing funding for SIREN grants, and especially for the incremental increase in funding each year over the past several years. Demand for this program continues to increase; in FY2024, more than 90 applications were submitted for SIREN grants – more than triple the number submitted at the program's start in FY2020 – but funding was only available to make 62 awards. To keep up with the ever-growing demand for the program, and to meet the significant needs of rural EMS providers, I respectfully request that the FY2026 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill include \$33 million for SIREN grants, also known as the Rural EMS Training and Equipment Assistance (REMSTEa) program.

Chairman Aderholt and Ranking Member DeLauro, on behalf of NAEMT and the EMS practitioners we represent, thank you for supporting those brave men and women who put their own lives on the line to provide critical health care services in your communities. I appreciate this opportunity to share these thoughts, and would welcome the chance to answer any questions and discuss these issues further with the Chairman, Ranking Member, and any other members of this Subcommittee.

Again, thank you.