

2022 EMS ON THE HILL DAY Talking Points

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

The SIREN Act passed both Houses of Congress as part of the [Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018](#) and was signed into law on December 20, 2018. This law creates a grant program for public and non-profit EMS agencies and fire departments in rural areas to support the recruitment, retention, education, and equipment for EMS personnel. Rural EMS agencies and fire departments often lack the resources to pay for even basic operational needs. The pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, creating a crisis for EMS in many rural areas.

The Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2020, 2021, 2022 provided \$5 million, \$5.5 million, and \$7.5 million respectively for SIREN grants; however, to seriously address existing needs, the program will require additional funds. These funds will assist rural EMS agencies and fire departments in delivering essential pre-hospital emergency healthcare for their community members.

In recognition of the great need for emergency services in rural areas, and the critical role EMS personnel serve across the country, in FY 2020 and 2021, SAMHSA awarded REMSTEA grants ranging from \$92,000 to \$200,000 to approximately 27 EMS agencies in multiple states for recruitment and training purposes. In December 2021, SAMHSA announced plans to award another 27 rural EMS applicants for 2022. This grant is supported by a multitude of national EMS and Fire organizations.

Please urge your lawmakers in the Senate and House to share their support with the Senate and House Appropriations Committees to reauthorize and fund the Siren Act at \$20 million for FY2023.

Support S. 2971/H.R. 2354, EMS Counts Act of 2021

Introduced by Senator Robert Casey (D-PA), Senator Susan Collins (R-ME), Representative Susan Wild (D-PA and Representative Fred Keller (R-PA), this legislation would require the Secretary of Labor to revise the Standard Occupational Classification System by dividing the general occupational category of Firefighter into four sub-categories. This bill will address the chronic miscounting of EMS personnel by allowing firefighters to identify themselves as cross-trained EMS practitioners.

Emergency medical services (EMS) is an integral component of our nation's response capacity to pandemics, and medical crises, including outbreaks of diseases, bombings, mass shootings, and natural disasters. EMS consists of a diverse group of health care practitioners, including Paramedics, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), and dual role Firefighter/EMTs and Firefighter/Paramedics. These professionals respond to nearly 28.5 million 9-1-1 calls each year. Without correct data on the number of EMTs and Paramedics practicing throughout the U.S., it is difficult to meet the health and safety needs of our communities.

S. 2971/H.R. 2354 directs the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to revise the broad description under the occupational series "33-2011 16 Firefighters" of the 2018 Standard Occupational Classification System of the BLS to include the following new occupations: (1) Firefighters. (2) Firefighter/EMTs. (3) Firefighter/Paramedics. (4) Firefighters, All Other.

Please urge your House and Senate lawmakers to pass the EMS Counts Act to ensure incorrect data does not harm EMS policymaking and funding decisions. Contact Veronica Goodman in Senator Casey's office at Veronica_Goodman@casey.senate.gov or Amanda Lincoln in Senator Collin's office at Amanda_lincoln@collins.senate.gov. In the House, please contact Julia Cinquegrani in Representative Susan Wild's office at Julia.Cinquegrani@mail.house.gov or Kevin O'Keefe at Kevin.OKeefe@mail.house.gov in Representative Fred Keller's office.

Support H.R. 2454/S. 2037, Protecting Access to Ground Ambulance Medical Services Act of 2021

Introduced by Senator Cortez Masto (D-NV) and Representative Terri Sewell (D-AL), this legislation seeks to address two major problems related to Medicare reimbursement for ground ambulance services to ensure that when a medical 9-1-1

call is made, or when other healthcare services provided by a ground ambulance are needed, that there will be an ambulance available.

- First, the legislation would extend the Medicare 2% urban, 3% rural, and “super rural” Medicare add-on payments until CMS completes the analysis of the ambulance cost collection survey that is just commencing;
- Second, the legislation seeks to address access to ambulance services in rural and low population density areas;
 - Changes in the fielding of the U.S. Census have negatively impacted the designation of rural and super-rural areas. As a result, hundreds of ZIP Codes considered rural (e.g., Sequoia National Park in CA) were categorized as urban because of commuting patterns that are the basis for defining rural ZIP Codes in large urban counties due to changes in the way the U. S. Census was administered, not because of actual changes in the population in these areas. Thus, the costs remain as high as they are in other rural areas, but the reimbursement has been significantly reduced;
 - The legislation seeks to have Medicare provide an appeals process for reconsidering a change in a ZIP Code’s status as rural or super-rural. In addition, it would create a new exception under Medicare that maintains rural ZIP Codes in large urban counties as rural or super-rural, if there are 1,000 or fewer people per square mile in the ZIP Code.

Please urge your Senate and House lawmakers to support H.R. 2454/S. 2037. Without the extension of the ground ambulance add-ons and a technical fix to the policies defining rural and super-rural areas, many ambulance organizations will not be able to continue serving their communities. Please contact Earl Flood in Representative Terri Sewell’s office at Earl.Flood@mail.house.gov or Casey Badmington in Senator Cortez Masto’s office at Casey.Badmington@cortezmasto.senate.gov.

Help Communities Address Crisis Level Shortage of EMS Personnel

The additional burdens placed on EMS systems and personnel during the pandemic highlighted the lack of federal investment and resources devoted to support our nation’s EMS system. Insufficient reimbursement for EMS care and lack of federal investment in EMS is a long-term problem that has been building for decades. The pandemic has exacerbated the challenge resulting in many EMS systems in our country are now at the breaking point. Most communities are facing crisis-level shortages of EMS personnel and many communities have been impacted by agency closures.

Please support legislative initiatives that help communities address the crisis-level shortages of EMS personnel by expanding existing grant programs targeted to EMS, including EMS eligibility to existing workforce apprenticeship programs, and ensuring that EMS is eligible and has access to federal grant programs to address the healthcare workforce shortage.

Action must be taken and we ask Congress to:

1. Expand existing grant programs targeted to EMS. In 2018, Congress reauthorized the Rural EMS Training and Equipment Assistance (REMSTEA) Program, also known as the SIREN grant, to provide funds directly to rural EMS agencies and fire departments to help them hire and train EMS personnel and purchase needed equipment, vehicles, medication and supplies. In Fiscal Year (FY) 22, this program was funded at \$7.5 million, a \$2 million increase from FY21. While we appreciate this second consecutive year of funding increases, this appropriation level will only reach a maximum of 375 EMS agencies and fire departments, yet thousands of agencies and departments in rural and other underserved communities are in desperate need. We ask lawmakers to substantially expand this grant program so that more EMS agencies and fire departments can receive assistance.
2. Include EMS eligibility for existing federal grants that support apprenticeship programs.

Apprenticeship programs have historically been used to spur workforce development or expansion in sectors of the economy that need workers. EMS agencies and fire departments struggling to recruit and retain EMS personnel would benefit from access to federal grants to support apprenticeship programs for Paramedics and EMTs. Currently there are no federal grant programs to support EMS apprenticeships. We ask lawmakers to

include EMS eligibility for federal grants offered through the Department of Labor and other agencies in order to promote apprenticeship programs for EMTs and Paramedics.

3. Ensure EMS access to federal grants targeting the development of the healthcare workforce. Many healthcare providers have access to extensive professional development resources and funding opportunities through federal government programs, but these opportunities are not currently available for EMS. Congress recently allocated \$1.5 billion through the American Rescue Plan to the Department of Health and Human Services to address the healthcare workforce shortage. However, these funds are not available to EMS agencies and fire departments. We ask lawmakers to ensure that EMS agencies and fire departments are eligible and have access to funds allocated to HHS to support the development of the healthcare workforce.