



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Nov. 7, 2024

Contact: Laura Biehl, Resch Strategies
laura@reschstrategies.com

Sounding the Alarm: Emergency care may soon be unavailable in Eastern U.P. due to nearly \$500,000 owed for care to Michigan prisons

Kinross Township EMS is one of at least 15 agencies who were not paid by the Michigan Department of Corrections healthcare provider Wellpath

Lansing, Michigan – Delinquent payments by the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) former health provider Wellpath to EMS agencies will soon leave a portion of the Upper Peninsula without emergency response in some of its local communities.

EMS providers operating near Michigan’s prisons provided emergency services to inmates in partnership with Wellpath, only to not receive payments for their treatment to patients. Wellpath’s contract with the State of Michigan ended in April 2024 and Michigan EMS agencies have not been paid.

“EMS agencies are trusted to show up no matter what, but we can’t be expected to be able to do that if we aren’t compensated for our work,” said Jeff White, chief of Richmond Lenox EMS, serving portions of Macomb and St. Clair Counties. “It is unacceptable to punish us for MDOC and the State of Michigan not holding their healthcare vendor accountable when we never had a say on the vendor to begin with. We upheld our duty to provide lifesaving care to all Michiganders, it’s time for state leaders to step up and rectify this situation before it literally endangers the health and safety of Michigan communities.”

The Michigan Association of Ambulance Services alerted state leaders to this dangerous issue this summer, calling for lack of compensation for the emergency services to be reimbursed by the State of Michigan. To date, no action has been taken to rectify this situation and the nearly \$6 million deficit is taking its toll on EMS agencies, which will impact lifesaving operations quickly without reimbursement.

Kinross EMS, which serves a 640 square-mile area of eight townships in Chippewa County may soon be left without emergency services unless this situation is rectified. This also means the agency’s 39 hardworking first responders could be left without jobs. Kinross EMS is owed nearly \$500,000 by Wellpath, which accounts for 11% of the agency’s budget, is less than a month from not being able to make payroll due to the lack of compensation.

Under Michigan law, EMS agencies are required to respond to 9-1-1 requests including calls to Michigan's prisons. Three state prisons are within Kinross EMS' service area. Lack of payment has a greater impact on smaller EMS providers like Kinross EMS, which has elevated this serious issue to a crisis.

"The lack of compensation for our emergency care in Michigan's prisons has become a serious crisis that will soon affect our ability to serve our communities," said Kinross EMS Director Renee Gray. "EMS is expected to respond 24/7/365 and it's not acceptable to not be compensated for our work, especially not when we are assisting the State of Michigan."

While the impact at other affected agencies hasn't reached the same crisis level, the lack of payments has already resulted in agencies cutting back in varying areas. Affected agencies have had to freeze hiring of new employees, delay purchases of replacement medical equipment, reduce cost of living increases to employees and stop the purchase of new ambulances. If this issue isn't resolved soon, the situation will certainly become more dire at all affected agencies.

MAAS is reiterating its call for the funds to be reimbursed through a budget supplemental during the Lamé Duck session before the session concludes.

The Michigan Association of Ambulance Services is a statewide trade association representing and advocating for ambulance services. In 2023, MAAS members were responsible for 1.7 million ambulance transports, serving 80% of Michigan counties. MAAS members also provide community paramedicine, ER diversion and 9-1-1 services in several areas of Michigan. For more information, visit miambulance.org.

###