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Michigan paramedic and EMT shortage worsening daily, EMS agencies struggling to cover shifts

Need for increased state funding more serious than ever

Lansing, Michigan – The EMS staffing crisis is accelerating daily in Michigan, making it difficult for EMS agencies to cover shifts, slowing down ambulance response times in some areas of Michigan.

“EMS agencies are facing a serious emergency that is making it hard for us to properly serve our communities,” said Ken Cummings, president and CEO of Tri-Hospital EMS in St. Clair County. “While the state budget is on hold in Lansing, the staffing shortage our agencies are facing is getting worse every day.”

The paramedic and EMT shortage, which began a few years ago in Michigan, was exacerbated by the pandemic and now has become a full-blown emergency, with some agencies concerned about the future. This shortage affects all EMS providers including public, private and nonprofit agencies.

The shortage is especially hitting hard in smaller communities, where agencies have smaller staffs to begin with. Bay Ambulance in Baraga, about 70 miles outside of Marquette, recently lost two of its paramedics, which accounted for a third of its workforce. The inability to find new staff is putting a serious strain on the remaining staff, even forcing the agency director to cover many shifts himself.

“It is an understatement to say we are facing a staffing emergency in EMS,” said Gary Wadaga, director of Bay Ambulance in Baraga, located in the Upper Peninsula. “We’re doing the best we can, but we need help to keep our existing paramedics and EMTs and bring in new staff to ensure we can protect the communities we serve.”

Currently, there are over 1,000 openings for full time paramedics and emergency medical technicians across the state. Michigan EMS leaders are pushing state leaders for a budget increase that could be used to increase pay for paramedics and EMTs to better recruit and retain individuals to the profession.

“We need to be able to serve our communities and that’s becoming harder and harder without more funds to attract more paramedics and EMTs into the field,” said Brian Scribner, executive director of Southwestern Michigan Community Ambulance Service. “Every day this problem is getting worse, and we don’t have a second to waste. The safety of our communities depends on it.”

The Michigan Association of Ambulance Services and the Michigan Association of Fire Chiefs have called on state leaders to increase funding to bolster EMS payments and increase EMS employee salaries. Currently EMS services are only reimbursed for 10 to 25 percent of their Medicaid costs. Michigan EMS also has requested a training grant to get new paramedics trained and into the field quickly.

More information about the legislative agenda is available at www.miambulance.org/legislativeagenda.

About MAAS

The Michigan Association of Ambulance Services is a statewide trade association representing and advocating for ambulance services. MAAS members serve 70 percent of Michigan counties and were responsible for more than 700,000 or 61 percent of ambulance transports in 2020. MAAS members also provide community paramedicine, ER diversion and 9-1-1 services in several areas of Michigan. For more information, visit www.miambulance.org.

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