



National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians
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April 10, 2015

Ellen P. Carlin, DVM
Co - Director
Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense

Dear Dr. Carlin,

Thank you for your kind invitation to submit recommendations to the "Blue Ribbon Study Panel for Biodefense" in support of Field Emergency Medical Services (EMS). Field EMS practitioners are an essential part of the first responder community, delivering essential life-saving or unscheduled medical care to patients, primarily outside the hospital. Every year, 840,669 EMS practitioners respond to 17.4 million calls, according to the National Library of Medicine, across the United States. In the event of an incident involving a biological agent, it is assured that EMS would be relied upon to respond and mitigate. EMS has taken the lead, as the primary medical responders, to a variety of scenarios in the past decade including Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the H1N1 influenza pandemic, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), and most recently, Ebola.

We commend the Blue Ribbon panel for bringing attention to this important topic on biodefense; however, we have serious concerns with the decision to not engage the EMS community and provide a report to Congress articulating the challenges of all supposed first responders around biodefense. Significantly troubling is a lack of understanding by the panel of the essential and leading role of EMS as a first responder in biological events, and the narrowed, low probability focus of biological threats focused upon to increase our nation's biodefense.

Field EMS is an essential public service provided by governmental and nongovernmental agencies and practitioners every day, and during catastrophic incidents. Fire and law enforcement agencies are integral to biological events, but EMS will be leading field emergency medical patient care in response to any biological event. While 40% of fire departments provide EMS, the majority of EMS practitioners in the United States are single role providers working for third service, hospital-based and private EMS agencies. It is most unfortunate that the panel did not engage with the single largest group of first responders, field EMS.

Furthermore, there appears to be a narrowly defined focus on "low risk" threats, such as overt biological attacks by state actors or rogue terrorists. While we continue to respond to "white powder" incidents, these are more of a sporadic

nuisance than actual threat. As mentioned above, the most pressing "biological" threats continue to be emerging infectious disease. EMS practitioners respond daily to the biological events of infectious disease from minor to lethal airborne and body fluid-borne pathogens. These essential medical first responders represent the highest at-risk, and will bear the bulk of the responsibility during biological events.

Coordinated and high-quality field EMS is essential to the Nation's security. The essential role of field EMS in disaster preparedness and response must be incorporated into the national preparedness and response strategy. It is imperative that EMS practitioners' collective concerns and challenges around a field emergency medical response to a biological event be given substantial worth and due diligence. Providing a one-page synopsis to express the profession's essential medical function around biological events and important role in biodefense is short-sighted.

We would be happy to discuss with you further the essential role of field EMS and the challenges faced in preparing for, responding to, and mitigating biological events to validate your report to Congress. We look forward to working towards a more fair and equitable incorporation of the voice of field EMS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Conrad Thomas Kearns".

Conrad "Chuck" Kearns, MBA, Paramedic, EMD
NAEMT President