



October 1, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell & Minority Leader McCarthy,

Our paramedics and emergency medical technicians (EMTs), as well as the organizations that they serve, take on substantial risk every day to treat and transport patients that call 9-1-1. But our nation's EMS system is facing a crippling workforce shortage, a long-term problem that has been building for more than a decade. It threatens to undermine our emergency 9-1-1 infrastructure and deserves urgent attention by the Congress.

The most sweeping [survey](#) of its kind — involving nearly 20,000 employees working at 258 EMS organizations — found that overall turnover among paramedics and EMTs ranges from 20 to 30 percent annually. With percentages that high, ambulance services face 100% turnover over a four-year period. Staffing shortages compromise our ability to respond to healthcare emergencies, especially in rural and underserved parts of the country.

The pandemic exacerbated this shortage and highlighted our need to better understand the drivers of workforce turnover. There are many factors. Our ambulance crews are suffering under the grind of surging demand, burnout, fear of getting sick and stresses on their families. In addition, with COVID-19 halting clinical and in-person trainings for a long period of time, our pipeline for staff is stretched even more.

The challenge is to make sure that the paramedics and EMTs of the future know that EMS is a rewarding destination. Many healthcare providers have extensive professional development resources, but that simply does not exist for EMS. COVID-19 has put additional pressures on the health care system and added another layer of complexity to the emergency response infrastructure.

### **HRSA EMS Training Funding**

Fortunately, there are immediate and long-term solutions. Although the provider relief funds are essential and helpful to address the challenges of the pandemic, we need funding for EMS that addresses paramedic and EMT training, recruitment, and advancement more directly. The Congress can provide specific direction and funds to the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to help solve this workforce crisis. Those funds can be used to pay for critical training and professional development programs. Some of our members have already begun offering programs and would benefit from additional funding support from HRSA. Funding public-private partnerships between community colleges and private employers to increase the applicant pool and training and employment numbers through grants could overcome the staffing deficit we face.

### **Paramedic and EMT Direct Pay Bump**

In addition, more immediately targeting funds for EMS retention could address the shortage we are experiencing day to day. To help ambulance services retain paramedics and EMTs, we request funds through HRSA to be paid directly to paramedics and EMTs. These earmarked funds could be distributed to each state with specific guidance that the State Offices of EMS distribute the funds to all ground ambulance services using a proportional formula (per field medic).

### **COVID-19 Medicare Reimbursement Increase**

With capitated payments by federal payors, there are limited funds to transfer into workforce initiatives. Increasing Medicare payments temporarily would be meaningful to compete with other employers and other jobs. This could help infuse additional funds into the workforce and create innovative staffing models that take into account hospital bed shortages and overflow.

### **Congressional Hearings on EMS Workforce Shortage**

The workforce shortage crisis facing EMS spans several potential Committees of jurisdiction. This critical shortage is particularly felt in many of our rural and underserved communities. As Congress moves on the steps we have outlined above, we also urge you to organize hearings in the appropriate Committees to develop long-term solutions and focus the country's attention on these urgent issues.

Thank you in advance for continuing to ensure that our frontline responders have the resources necessary to continue caring for our patients in their greatest moment of need, while maintaining the long-term viability of our nation's EMS system.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Shawn Baird, President  
American Ambulance Association



Bruce Evans, President  
National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians