

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 13, 2023

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human  
Services, Education, and Related Agencies  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Baldwin and Ranking Member Capito:

Thank you for your support in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 for a \$10.5 million appropriation—a \$3 million increase—for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to provide grants to implement the *Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) Act*. As you begin consideration of the FY 2024 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations bill, we respectfully request that the Subcommittee include robust appropriations to bolster rural emergency medical services (EMS) agencies and fire departments in delivering essential health care for rural America.

Across America's small towns, farming communities, and frontier areas, rural EMS agencies—including those operated by fire departments—are a lifeline to the health care system. Residents in rural America on average are older, have higher rates of chronic illness, and have lower incomes. Even before COVID-19, rural EMS agencies faced challenges in delivering quality emergency response and service coordination, in part due to reliance on volunteer workforces, recent declines in primary care and hospital service availability, great distances between health care facilities, and low reimbursement rates. At the same time, EMS agencies face ever-greater responsibilities, such as preparing for disasters and bioterror threats, supporting the needs of an aging population, and serving on the frontlines of the opioid crisis. The pandemic has only further strained finances and operations for these backbone rural providers, with increased costs for personal protective equipment, workforce strains, and reduced fundraising opportunities.

These first responders are often the only health care providers in their area and face difficulty securing expensive equipment and in personnel recruitment and retention. In recognition of these challenges, Congress passed the SIREN Act as part of the 2018 Farm Bill (P.L. 115-334). The SIREN Act reauthorized the Rural EMS Training and Equipment Program to directly support public and non-profit rural EMS agencies in their efforts to train and recruit staff, provide education to satisfy certification requirements, and address critical equipment needs—purchasing everything from naloxone and first aid kits to power stretchers or new ambulances.

Robust federal investments, building on the \$10.5 million provided in FY 2023, will be necessary in FY 2024 to provide grant awards across rural communities in each state, meet the evolving needs of rural EMS agencies, and enable them to continue to support access to health

care during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Thank you for your commitment to this important rural health program.

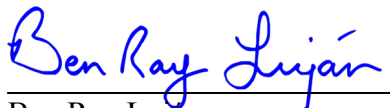
Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer  
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



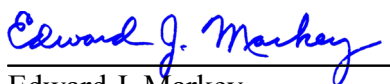
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Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Roger Marshall M.D.  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



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Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



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John Fetterman  
United States Senator



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Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator



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Tina Smith  
United States Senator



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Peter Welch  
United States Senator



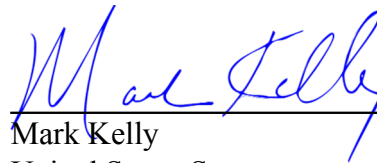
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Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator



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Jon Ossoff  
United States Senator



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Mark Kelly  
United States Senator