

September 12, 2023

The Honorable Bernie Sanders, Chairman
Senate Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions
(HELP) Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, Ranking
Member
Senate Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions
(HELP) Committee
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Cassidy:

On behalf of the hundreds of thousands of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel we represent, including those in your states, we write to ask for immediate action to address a longstanding undercounting of EMS personnel.

EMS consists of a diverse group of health care practitioners, including Paramedics, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), and dual role Firefighter/EMTs and Firefighter/Paramedics. Unfortunately, the Department of Labor/Bureau of Labor Statistics (DOL/BLS) current occupational classification system does not accurately classify firefighters who are cross trained as a paramedic or EMT. Given the fact that at least 62% of all fire departments provide EMS, this failure to recognize cross-trained fire and EMS personnel leads to a significant and chronic undercount of EMS personnel, and the consequences are significant.

For example, in 2021, both the federal government and the National Academy of Medicine looked to BLS data to determine how many COVID-19 vaccinations would be needed to cover all first responders. The BLS data showed a count of roughly 248,000 paramedics and EMTs in the U.S., whereas the true number of EMS personnel at that time was over 1 million according to the [2020 National EMS Assessment](#). BLS's inaccurate count led to a dramatic shortfall in the number of doses actually needed to protect all EMS personnel across the nation.

Unfortunately, BLS has resisted efforts to change its data collection system in order to accurately count the number of firefighters who also serve as EMS personnel. Without this change, we cannot track gaps in emergency services and meet the emergency healthcare needs of communities. That's why we worked with Senators Casey and Collins to introduce the EMS Counts Act (S. 1115), which would require the Secretary of Labor to revise the Standard Occupational Classification System by dividing the general occupational category of "33-2011 Firefighters" into four sub-categories to include the following new occupations: (1) Firefighters (2) Firefighter/EMTs (3) Firefighter/Paramedics (4) Firefighters, All Other.

These changes will help address the chronic miscounting of EMS personnel by allowing firefighters to identify themselves as cross-trained EMS practitioners. EMS professionals respond to nearly 42 million 9-1-1 calls each year. These brave men and women are being called upon to respond to increasingly catastrophic natural and manmade disasters, as evidenced within the last several weeks by the unprecedented wildfires in Hawaii and hurricane in California, in addition to other health emergencies. Without correct data on the number of EMTs and paramedics practicing throughout the U.S., it will become increasingly difficult to meet the health and safety needs of our communities.

We recognize the many issues the committee is grappling with, and appreciate the challenges you are trying to address. This legislation is absolutely vital, and we respectfully request that the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee advance this legislation as quickly as possible. We stand ready to serve as a resource to you and to your staff, and appreciate your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Academy of International Mobile Healthcare Integration (AIMHI)

American Ambulance Association (AAA)

American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP)

Association of Air Medical Services (AAMS)

International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC)

International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)

National Association of EMS Educators (NAEMSE)

National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT)

National Association of EMS Physicians (NAEMSP)

National Association of State EMS Officials (NASEMSO)

National EMS Management Association (NEMSMA)

National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT)

National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC)