

**Bruce Evans – President, National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians  
(NAEMT)  
Written Testimony for the Record – FY2023 Appropriations  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education  
and Related Agencies  
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Thank you, Chairwoman DeLauro, Ranking Member Cole, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. My name is Bruce Evans, and I am the President of the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT). I am also a fire chief, leading a fire-based EMS organization in a super rural area of Southwest Colorado – 12,000 residents in 264 square miles.

Founded in 1975 and nearly 72,000 members strong, NAEMT represents our nation's frontline EMS practitioners, who provide critical, lifesaving services to communities nationwide, especially in rural, frontier, and other hard-to-reach areas. NAEMT would like to offer our views on the Subcommittee's FY 2023 bill. At the outset, we write to ask the subcommittee to provide \$20 million for the SIREN Rural EMS Equipment and Training Assistance (REMSTEA) program within the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations. Other priorities for us include the passage of the EMS Counts Act of 2021, which would require the Secretary of Labor to revise the Standard Occupational Classification System by dividing the general occupational category of Firefighter into four sub-categories, addressing the chronic miscounting of EMS personnel by allowing firefighters to identify themselves as cross-trained EMS practitioners. We are also strongly advocating for enhanced workforce recruitment tools, which we highlight below.

Passed in the 2018 Farm Bill, the SIREN/REMSTEA grant program supports rural public and nonprofit EMS agencies in their efforts to complete their mandate to provide critical

emergency medical care to all the residents in the communities they serve. Among other needs, the grants help rural EMS agencies train and retain staff and purchase equipment. This is important because community demands keep growing: each year, fire departments and EMS agencies respond to more than 20 million calls for emergency services. While the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the plight of these agencies, EMS practitioners and agencies were facing severe challenges before the virus' outbreak. This can be attributed, in part, to greater distances between health care facilities and low reimbursement rates. The most pressing impact is the decline of available medical care in rural communities, which has heightened the need for already-stretched EMS agencies to perform these lifesaving services.

Rural EMS organizations, like mine in Colorado, have disproportionately suffered from shrinking revenue streams and increased demand before the pandemic and now, especially as it relates to synthetic opioid overdoses, which have skyrocketed and do not seem to be slowing down. The result is, unfortunately, predictable: increasing workforce shortages as EMS personnel become increasingly burnt out, face shrinking compensation, and are constantly exposed to unpredictable and dangerous environments. While these challenges are not limited to one region, rural EMS organizations across the country are more likely to shut their doors, leaving their residents without reliable access to local ambulance service. Recognizing this landscape, in FY2020, FY2021, and FY2022, your committee provided \$5 million, \$5.5 million, and \$7.5 million for SIREN grants, respectively.

In short, more money is needed to bring more people aboard to ensure that our professionals are provided a safe, healthy, and respectful work environment, and that their EMS agency can effectively serve their communities. The enhanced funding for the SIREN/REMSTEA program will go to good use, especially as our country and economy recover

from the economic and health care crisis brought on by the pandemic. Ultimately, without the support this grant program provides, many more local EMS operations will likely have to close their doors.

There are also a few other critical workforce priorities that would benefit EMS personnel. While the REMSTEA grants dramatically improve workforce outcomes, there are other ways Congress can help. First, Congress should include all EMS in existing federal grants that support apprenticeship programs. Current apprenticeship programs cannot be accessed directly by EMS agencies. Including EMS eligibility for federal grants offered through the Department of Labor will help buttress our ranks. Second, Congress should ensure that EMS is eligible for and has access to federal grants targeting the development of the health care workforce. Many healthcare providers have access to extensive professional development resources and funding opportunities through federal government programs, but these opportunities are not currently available for EMS. Through the American Rescue Plan, Congress allocated \$1.5 billion to the Department of Health and Human Services to address the health care workforce shortage. However, these funds are not available to EMS agencies and fire departments, and we believe they must be.

On behalf of our 72,000 members who live and work in hundreds of Congressional districts across our country, thank you again for supporting our brave men and women who provide important roles in the health care ecosystem. SIREN/REMSTEA grants will certainly help them do their jobs to their fullest ability.