

Help Communities Address Crisis-level Shortages of EMS Personnel

Request

Please support legislative initiatives that help communities address the crisis-level shortages of emergency medical services (EMS) personnel by expanding existing grant programs targeted to EMS; including EMS in existing workforce apprenticeship programs; and ensuring that EMS is eligible for and has access to federal grant programs to address the healthcare workforce shortage.

Background

Insufficient reimbursement for EMS care and lack of federal investment in EMS is a long-term problem that has been building for decades. The additional burdens placed on EMS systems and personnel during the pandemic has exacerbated the challenge, pushing many EMS systems in our country to the breaking point. Most communities are facing crisis-level shortages of EMS personnel, and many communities have seen EMS agencies close altogether, removing this critical community lifeline.

The shortage of EMS personnel threatens to undermine our emergency 9-1-1 response infrastructure. In 2021, 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 20-30% percent annually. EMS personnel are now leaving the profession faster than they can be replaced, compromising our ability to respond to healthcare emergencies, especially in rural and underserved parts of the country. Action must be taken and we ask Congress to:

1. Expand existing grant programs targeted to EMS. In 2018, Congress reauthorized the Rural EMS Training and Equipment Assistance (REMSTEA) Program, also known as SIREN, to provide funds directly to rural EMS agencies and fire departments to help them hire and train EMS personnel and purchase needed equipment, vehicles, medication, and supplies. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2022, this program was funded at \$7.5 million, a \$2 million increase from FY2021. While we appreciate this second consecutive year of funding increases, this appropriation level will only reach a maximum of 375 EMS agencies and fire departments, thousands of agencies and departments in rural and other underserved communities are in desperate need. We ask lawmakers to substantially expand this grant program so that more EMS agencies and fire departments can receive assistance.
2. Include EMS in existing federal grants that support apprenticeship programs. Apprenticeship programs have historically been used to spur workforce development or expansion in sectors of the economy that need workers. EMS agencies and fire departments struggling to recruit and retain EMS personnel would benefit from access to federal grants to support apprenticeship programs for Paramedics and EMTs. Currently there are no federal grant programs to support EMS apprenticeships. We ask lawmakers to include EMS eligibility for federal grants offered through the Department of Labor and other agencies in order to promote apprenticeship programs for EMTs and Paramedics.
3. Ensure EMS is eligible for and has access to federal grants targeting the development of the healthcare 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 (ARP), Congress recently allocated \$1.5 billion to the Department of Health and Human Services to address the healthcare workforce shortage. However, these funds are not available to EMS agencies and fire departments. We ask lawmakers to ensure that EMS agencies and fire departments are eligible for and have access to funds allocated to HHS to support the development of the healthcare workforce.