

2021 EMS ON THE HILL DAY Talking Points

Funding for the Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) Law

The SIREN Act passed both Houses of Congress as part of the [Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018](#) and was signed into law on December 20, 2018. This law creates a grant program for public and non-profit EMS agencies and fire departments in rural areas to support the recruitment, retention, education, and equipment for EMS personnel. Rural EMS agencies and fire departments often lack the resources to pay for even basic operational needs. The pandemic has exacerbated these challenges, creating a crisis for EMS in many rural areas.

The Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) Appropriations bills for Fiscal Year 2020 and 2021 provided \$5 million and \$5.5 million respectively for SIREN grants; however, to seriously address existing needs, the program will require additional funds. These funds will assist rural EMS agencies and fire departments in delivering essential pre-hospital emergency healthcare for their community members.

In recognition of the great need for EMS in rural areas and the critical role EMS personnel serve across the country, in Fiscal Year 2020 SAMHSA awarded REMSTEAs/SIREN grants ranging from \$92,000 to \$200,000 to 27 EMS agencies in multiple states. SAMHSA received 66 applications, but only 27 were able to be funded. \$20 million would provide 100 grants nationwide or 2 grants per state.

Please urge your lawmakers in the Senate and House to share their support with the Senate and House Appropriations Committees to fund the Siren Act at \$20 million for FY2022.

Support Permanent Reimbursement for EMS Treatment in Place (TIP)

On March 10th, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (P.L. 117-2). Section 9832 (S.149/H.R. 1609) of the legislation provides HHS with the authority to issue an emergency waiver of the requirements for ground ambulance providers and suppliers to allow reimbursement for the healthcare services provided when a community-wide EMS protocol prohibiting transport is in place retroactive to March 1, 2020.

Historically, Medicare does not reimburse ground ambulance service providers or suppliers for these healthcare services when the patient is not transported to a hospital. Some ambulance service providers and suppliers have seen 30-40 percent of their emergency call volume shift to these treatment in place responses. Without reimbursement, the provision of this care is not sustainable. Communities risk losing the very emergency medical providers and suppliers they have relied upon to help reduce hospital surge and decrease the infection rate.

Please thank your lawmaker in the House and Senate for taking this action on TIP and express your appreciation for this waiver during the Public Health Emergency (PHE). Please request that reimbursement for EMS treatment in place be made permanent.

Support H.R. 2354, EMS Counts Act of 2021

Introduced by Rep. Susan Wild (D-PA), this legislation 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. This bill will address the chronic miscounting of EMS personnel by allowing firefighters to identify themselves as cross-trained EMS practitioners.

Emergency medical services (EMS) is an integral component of our nation's response capacity to pandemics, and medical crises, including outbreaks of diseases, bombings, mass shootings, and natural disasters. EMS consists of a

diverse group of health care practitioners, including Paramedics, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs), and dual role Firefighter/EMTs and Firefighter/Paramedics. These professionals respond to nearly 28.5 million 9-1-1 calls each year. Without correct data on the number of EMTs and Paramedics practicing throughout the U.S., it is difficult to meet the health and safety needs of our communities.

H.R. 2354 directs the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to revise the broad description under the occupational series “33-2011 16 Firefighters” of the 2018 Standard Occupational Classification System of the BLS to include the following new occupations: (1) Firefighters. (2) Firefighter/EMTs. (3) Firefighter/Paramedics. (4) Firefighters, All Other.

Please urge your House lawmaker to pass the EMS Counts Act and take steps to ensure incorrect data does not harm EMS policymaking and funding decisions. Contact Julia Cinquegrani in Representative Susan Wild’s office at Julia.Cinquegrani@mail.house.gov or Kevin.Keefe@mail.house.gov in Representative Fred Keller’s office.

Support H.R. 2454, Protecting Access to Ground Ambulance Medical Services Act of 2021

Introduced by Rep Terri Sewell (D-AL), this legislation seeks to address two major problems related to Medicare reimbursement for ground ambulance services to ensure that when a medical 9-1-1 call is made, or when other healthcare services provided by a ground ambulance are needed that there will be one available.

- First, the legislation would extend the Medicare 2% urban, 3% rural, and “super rural” Medicare add-on payments until CMS completes the analysis of the ambulance cost collection survey that is just commencing;
- Second, the legislation seeks to address access to ambulance services in rural and low population density areas;
 - Changes in the fielding of the U.S. Census have negatively impacted the designation of rural and super-rural areas. As a result, hundreds of ZIP Codes considered rural (e.g., Sequoia National Park in CA) were categorized as urban because of commuting patterns that are the basis for defining rural ZIP Codes in large urban counties due to changes in the way the U. S. Census was administered, not because of actual changes in the population in these areas. Thus, the costs remain as high as they are in other rural areas, but the reimbursement has been significantly reduced;
 - The legislation seeks to have Medicare provide an appeals process for reconsidering a change in a ZIP Code’s status as rural or super-rural. In addition, it would create a new exception under Medicare that maintains rural ZIP Codes in large urban counties as rural or super-rural, if there are 1,000 or fewer people per square mile in the ZIP Code.

Please urge your House lawmaker to support H.R. 2454. Without the extension of the ground ambulance add-ons and a technical fix to the policies defining rural and super-rural areas, many ambulance organizations will not be able to continue serving their communities. Contact is Earl Flood in Representative Terri Sewell’s office at Earl.Flood@mail.house.gov.