



"Dedicated to Quality Pre-Hospital Care"

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Georgia Association of EMS Policy Priorities

The following recommendations are based on the Senate Study Committee Report on EMS Recruitment and Retention.

PRIMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates, and raise them to the current Medicare reimbursement rates

The Committee learned about the difficulty EMS services has with receiving appropriate reimbursements from Medicaid in Georgia. The cost EMS bears in providing services to Medicaid patients, and simultaneously being unable to deny service like others in the healthcare industry, far outweighs what they are reimbursed by Medicaid. EMS has to bear this burden of cost that is not reimbursed, and its effects are detrimental to the entire industry. Providing an increase in Medicaid reimbursements will help services in providing better salaries, benefits, and services to their EMTs and paramedics. Given the mixture of public and private EMS services that provide care to Medicaid patients, providing an increase in Medicaid reimbursements will be a way to allow all services the ability to increase benefits for their employees.

Eliminate or reduce ambulance license fees

The Committee also learned of the ambulance license fees that EMS services must pay, and this money is entered into the Indigent Care Trust Fund (ICTF). The high cost of this licensing, particularly since it is assessed on each individual ambulance, is a large burden for EMS. This is especially true considering the lack of benefit for services are receiving for paying this costly fee. Eliminating this fee all together, reducing the amount of the fee, or specifically allowing the funds in the ICTF to go to EMS services for reimbursement of ambulance services, will bring much needed relief to the EMS industry.

Establish a funding source for trauma care

EMS provides the pre-hospital care that is vital to sustaining the lives of trauma patients, and is the first line of care to treat the patient. The creation of the Georgia Trauma Care Network Commission was a great step in the right direction for setting up a functioning trauma care network. However, funding will be necessary to allow the implementation of this network, and

funding allocated to the EMS industry will be necessary for EMS services to be better equipped to save the lives of Georgians across the state.

Create an alternative state certification exam for EMTs and Paramedics

As the Committee learned, currently in Georgia the only option for certification as an EMT or Paramedic is through the National Registry exam. While having this available to EMS is advantageous, it also presented problems to the industry. Particularly, the curriculum taught to EMS students does not necessarily correlate to the National Registry exam, and this is difficult to overcome with two separate entities developing the curriculum and the exam. Additionally, the revelation that National Registry is requiring everyone who uses their testing exams to obtain additional requirements, such as a national accreditation, creates additional burdens to training programs. Currently, only one technical college in Georgia has this accreditation, thus putting the burden on the rest to either obtain this accreditation or not teach these programs. Therefore, it is the Committee's recommendation that funding be provided to the OEMS/T for the development of an alternative state certification exam. The Committee does not recommend replacing the National Registry, but rather create an alternative exam that EMTs and paramedics in Georgia can take to be certified in Georgia, and that can be geared towards the curriculum used.

Create a stand-alone Office of EMS/Trauma or re-organize the current placement and structure of the Office of EMS/Trauma (OEMS/T)

Throughout the testimony presented to the Committee, the complicated relationship that the EMS industry in Georgia has with state agencies that regulate and reimburse EMS became blatantly obvious. Currently, the OEMS/T is located in the Division of Public Health (DPH) of the Department of Human Resources (DHR) and administers the regulatory functions over the EMS industry. However, the current funding structure provided to the OEMS/T and its location embedded deep in the bureaucratic office of DHR lead to the office and its important duties being largely overlooked. In order to provide the OEMS/T with the appropriate attention and acknowledgement for the office to carry out its duties, it is recommended that the office be separated from the current department it is under and established as its own stand-alone department, for the office to be re-located to a more suitable department within the state government, or for the office to given a higher profile designation within the current department or a new department in charge of regulating healthcare. Furthermore, DCH oversees the reimbursement to EMS for such programs as Medicaid. The complicated nature of EMS being regulated by one department and simultaneously reimbursed by a separate department is the source of many the problems afflicting EMS and its relationship with the state. Changing this so that EMS is regulated and reimbursed by a single department will be a key improvement for the EMS industry.

Provide stable and permanent funding for the Office of EMS/Trauma (OEMS/T)

The OEMS/T receives the majority of its funding through a federal block grant that is currently in jeopardy, and has been for the last several years. If this grant were to no longer be available, the OEMS/T regional offices would no longer have funding available. Creating a permanent stable funding from the state would provide the OEMS/T with ability to carry out its current duties, as well as provide updated technological resources, program support and system

development (not just creating more regulatory oversight for the office), and even develop some of the programs outlined in previous recommendations. Providing this funding to the OEMS/T would not exceed the cost of several million dollars.

Develop and provide full funding for EMS Instructor and EMS program for personnel at Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC)

Currently EMTs and paramedics have the ability to attend the GPSTC for some of the current programs at the center. However, in order to provide continued and advanced training for EMS, the committee suggests the creation of an EMS Instructor and EMS program that could be based and taught at the GPSTC. Such a program could offer specialized driver's training, tactical medic training, and water rescue training. Additionally, the Committee does not suggest creating these programs and placing them at GPSTC without the appropriate funding which should provide for a new instructor position and the necessary program.

Develop a director's program for human resources and leadership training

There are an invaluable number of quality EMS directors that efficiently run their services. However, there are many that are simply unknowledgeable when it comes to financial management, human resources and personnel management in their services. Creating a human resources and leadership training program for current and future EMS directors can aid in shaping EMS directors that are able to appropriately run their services and address the issues of the personnel that work under them. In the long run, this would potentially help stop those EMTs and paramedics from leaving the industry because of the relationships with their employers.

Develop high school recruitment & training programs

Currently, some EMS services work with their local school systems to develop work shadowing programs or provide training courses to high school students that have an interest in EMS. Allowing the EMS industry to reach people when they are at the beginning of making career decisions, and offering them an opportunity to gain experience that is applicable to all health care professions, is invaluable to recruitment efforts of the industry. Reaching out to the youngest possible demographic will be essential to replacing those currently in the EMS profession, whose average age is over 40 years old. These practices are great when done, but they are not widespread. Just as our state's technical colleges offer EMS courses at their schools around the state, so should Georgia's high schools. With the current emphasis from the state on the development of additional career academies throughout Georgia, the development of an EMS training program for high school students that would be available to students in career academies and high schools can boost the recruitment efforts of EMS.

Develop and provide insurance coverage for drivers between 18 and 21 years of age

EMS services are already limited in their ability to employ young people since EMTs must be at least 18 years of age. Furthermore, for many services it is difficult to obtain insurance coverage for their EMTs that are 18, 19, and 20 years old to drive ambulances. It becomes more difficult for EMS services to recruit and employ young EMTs when they are unable to let them perform their duties. These EMTs, despite their young age, receive the same training and are certified by the state's Department of Human Resources as capable of performing their life saving duties.

Providing for the coverage of these EMTs, so they may drive ambulances, will allow services to be in a better position to recruit and retain young individuals.

Develop a “mobile” retirement fund for EMS personnel

With the make up of the EMS industry being diverse as to the providing of emergency care by both public and private services, there are no across the board incentives to attract and retain qualified EMS personnel. The Committee heard from an overwhelming number of those testifying that the lack of a retirement fund for EMS personnel, and the existence of ones for other public safety services, is a major reason for the decreasing number of people that choose to stay in the industry. The ability for such a fund to be mobile as EMTs and paramedics move to different services throughout the state would also assist in keeping them in the industry.

SECONDARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Require grant writing assistance from the Department of Human Resources

The Committee learned how there are currently public safety grants available to EMS that are not being taken advantage of by the industry. One of the main reasons is the lack of experience in the grant writing process among EMS personnel. Further, DHR, which is the state agency that houses the OEMS/T, has staffed grant writers that are not used for EMS grant writing purposes. The Committee recommends directing DHR to use their currently available grant writing staff to assist the OEMS/T in developing grant writing assistance to EMS services.

Create an ongoing study of the retention problem

The Committee hopes that the problems brought to its attention by the EMS community can and will be addressed. However, the Committee also recognizes that just as EMS is facing problems today because of how the environment of our state has changed, it will continue to change in the future. There will be new challenges to EMS recruitment and retention efforts in the future, and therefore it will be necessary for the legislature or the appropriate state agency to further study these issues at points in the future. The hope would be that those with the ability to bring change can do so before the crisis is upon us.

Develop generic public relations tools for use by individual EMS Services

EMS services currently do their own promotion, but there is not a widespread, consolidated effort as a whole to push the EMS industry. The creation and funding of a generic public relations kit that the State Office of EMS/Trauma (OEMS/T) can use for promotion of the industry as a whole, as well as making it flexible so that services can tailor the public relations tools to their individual needs, will bring consistency and create a coordinated effort in informing the public on EMS career opportunities and the means with which to enter the profession.

Coordinate with other services, specifically fire, emergency management, nursing and hospitals to boost recruitment efforts for all areas

The EMS community realizes that recruitment and retention of personnel is an issue in

additional realms of the public safety and healthcare world. It is recommended that the EMS community coordinate with other public safety and healthcare services to develop mechanisms for the recruitment in all sectors and to work with the state's higher education and technical colleges to enable the education between the different sectors of public safety and healthcare be transferable between every profession.

Development of programs to help increase the number of full-time instructors

The complexity of the education process makes it difficult for a part-time person to keep up with the new standards and to provide additional assistance to students outside of the designated course time. Additional full-time instructors will be able to focus on increasing initial exam pass rates by students and addressing the needs of a greater number of students.

Further develop or create continuing education and career development for EMTs and paramedics

Several of those that testified to the Committee cited other studies which found that career and education advancement was a key to keeping excellent people in the EMS profession, as people often times want to feel that there is a place for them to go as they further develop their career. Those that testified stated that there is a lack of career development and advanced education available in Georgia. The creation of an EMS director program on human resources and training, the development of an EMS program at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC) (both discussed previously in these recommendations), are potential examples of continuing education and career development that will advance EMS as a profession.

Improve regionalized system to ensure training courses in every part of the state

All EMS personnel throughout the state should have access to EMS education. While most areas of the state have suitable locations for the EMS training, the availability of it is lacking in other areas. Particularly in rural areas, there is a lack of available EMS programs available at local technical colleges or private programs. Increasing the availability of EMS programs at all technical colleges and allowing for distance learning for portions of courses that do not require labs can increase the availability of EMS education to everyone in the state.

Increase funding to the Department of Adult and Technical Education (DTAE) for EMS instruction and development

Providing additional funding to the DTAE will allow for the expansion of courses available statewide, funding for small and rural technical colleges and their smaller class sizes, and funding to increase the number of full-time instructors

Require background checks for EMT and Paramedics students

Some educational institutions already employ the practice of performing background checks before a student enters a training program. However, this practice is not universal. If potential students were screened before being allowed to train, it would save the trouble of having someone who is already trained of being unable to take the National Registry Test or to be employed by an EMS service because of their criminal background. Ensuring that students are

employable before they even begin training will assist services in their recruitment efforts.

Establish an “Equipment Grant Program”

The funding problems involved in EMS include the lack of appropriate and up to date equipment. In different areas of the state, there are many hard working EMTs and paramedics that are working with aged and outdated equipment. The establishment of a grant program specifically targeting the equipment for EMS can provide further assistance in assuring that the care Georgians are receiving is the best available.