



Stephen Walker, Director

Commissioners of St. Mary's County

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John E. O'Connor, Commissioner

To: Commissioners of St. Mary's County
Dr. Rebecca Bridgett

Fr: Stephen Walker, Director

Date: October 20, 2020

Re: Supplemental Staffing of County Rescue Squads – Cares Act Funding

HISTORICAL/BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In the past few months there has been a noticeable increase in incidents where Basic Life Support ambulances are unable to respond to calls for service as a result of decreased EMS staffing levels. We are at critically low staffing levels, placing our community at severe risk. COVID has played a large part in this shortage. Many of our responders are older experienced personnel that have retired from a related profession and serve in the EMS field. Many have now chosen not to staff an ambulance and place themselves at risk during COVID 19. Additionally, there is a growing trend nationally, our younger responders must work and make a living, which means less personnel to respond during the normal workday hours.

Repeatedly, our 911 center dispatches ambulances to calls for service, only to receive no response, a delayed response. The dispatchers then move on to another rescue squad, and so on and so on. On many occasions, we are unable to find an ambulance to respond until we have made many attempts, sometimes more than 10. Recently we had a person in distress call in and ask for an ambulance, complaining of chest pains and attempts were made to dispatch an ambulance. The first ambulance did not respond, the second one did. The dispatcher stayed on the phone for 23 minutes before an ambulance arrived. While on the phone the caller went into cardiac arrest.

The average response time in St. Mary's County for an ambulance to respond to an incident is under 15 minutes (as identified by an EMSOP study a few years ago). Since January 1, 2020, 1292 ems calls for service took longer than 14 minutes to respond to a caller's request for help; some took over an hour. Charles County and Calvert are now regular responders into our county for EMS calls.

Normal response plan of our current EMS system:

Currently we have seven Rescue Squads in the County. Each Rescue Squad has between 2 and 4 ambulances. Currently, the plan of response for our volunteers is for each Rescue Squad to have one Ambulance staffed with two Emergency Medical Technicians on duty, 24 hours a day. This means there should be 14 EMT's on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week in St. Mary's County. Clearly, that has not been successful. However, as many EMS volunteers are diligently and faithfully serving our community, we only need to be concerned at this time with filling the gaps.

SUMMARY:

It is important to note that the level and quality of Emergency Medical Service, (actual medical treatment) by our First Responders is exemplary, serving our community exceptionally well.

However, the delivery of services; getting our EMS First Responders to those in need, is where we are lacking substantially and that is due to reduced staffing.

Reduced staffing has been a growing trend in volunteer services across our nation for several years. However, COVID 19 has also had a substantial impact and compounded the staffing shortage. Many volunteers will not staff an ambulance for fear of contracting COVID 19.

Plan of Action:

On April 21, 2020, the CSMC approved the appropriation of \$3,000,000.00 FY2019 Fund Balance to be allocated for COVID 19 relief. I propose the cost of the purchase of an ambulance, and necessary equipment to make it fully operational, be drawn on this available funding. (\$80,000.00)

On May 5, 2020, the CSMC approved a plan of action for Cares Act COVID 19 relief funding. The Department of Emergency Services identified a need for Contract Medics to be used for COVID 19 Relief. (\$472,992.00)

This was established when we received dire warnings of an impending surge of infection and probable fatalities. As the Pandemic progressed, the number of fatalities and ICU admissions waned, and the decision was made to hold that funding in reserve for future needs that may arise. That need has now risen; we are in immediate need of additional EMS personnel to staff the county's ambulances. This is an emergent situation that must be addressed immediately. What follows is the course of action that has led us to this point.

- I directed our Career EMS Chief, Mr. Stamey to contact each of the seven rescue squads and inquire if they need staffing assistance. Each of the rescue squad Chiefs have verbally asked for assistance. We are now asking for them to follow up with written requests specifying their needs. I have attached the first letter of request with more to follow.
- The specific plan of action for our response to reduced staffing was devised based on the specific needs identified by the seven rescue Chiefs.
- I reached out to the contractor that provides services to the Advanced Life Support of St. Mary's County. I asked for a proposal for services. That has culminated in a contract being developed, which is in your packet.
- I reached out to Calvert County and asked for a Memorandum of Understanding template, which they provided and modified it for our use; that is in your packet. This MOA specifically identified insurance requirements and responsibilities, duties, staffing, scheduling and other aspects of this initiative.

This initiative is for the provision of EMT staffing from the St. Marys County Commissioners to each of the seven rescue squads. In return, they will authorize our contract EMT's to operate their ambulances. This is a true partnership in response to a critical need in time of this Pandemic.

Additional county resources that will assist the EMS system:

1. We are planning to contract for 4 Medics that will operate from Emergency Services. These Medics will be assisting Mr. Stamey in running Medic Advanced Life Support calls. The decision to take this step is based on the frequency of Mr. Stamey's regular response to ALS calls due to the high demand and incidents of uncovered ALS shifts. Mr. Stamey works in close concert with the ALS of St. Mary's County, using their assignment software, logging in when he is available for response.

Note: It is important to note that during the recent double homicide in Leonardtown, Mr. Stamey and two of my staff that are certified EMT's responded to that homicide due to the urgency of the situation. Department of Emergency Services personnel were the first EMS personnel on the scene, and we managed the scene for approximately 10 minutes before any other EMS personnel arrived on the scene.

2. We have planned for the purchase of an ambulance that will be used solely by St. Mary's County employees that are qualified to do so. The intent of this part of the plan is to have this available for my staff to assist with calls when there is simply no one else available. Several of my staff are certified EMT's and Paramedics and are qualified to respond and treat patients.

COLLABORATION:

We are partnering with the seven EMS rescue squads and the Advanced Life Support of St. Mary's County for the delivery of EMS services.

BUDGET IMPACT:

There are two specific funding sources that will be impacted:

Supplemental staffing: Cares act funding (US2030) in the amount of \$472,992.00, as described in the planning document.

Ambulance purchase: Used ambulance for \$40,000.00, necessary equipment to equip is 40,000.00 for \$80,000.00. This will be drawn on the Covid relief funding that was designated from reserve. This funding was designated at the beginning on April 21, 2020 by the CSMC, original amount of \$3,000,000.00.

TIMELINE:

Much planning has gone into this very quickly. This will become operational as quickly as possible.