

Summary of Sen. Bernie Sanders' EMS Staffing and Support Act

March 2022

Emergency Medical Services across the country provide vital support to people in their most desperate moments, and the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how essential they are in our communities. However, the Federal government does not do enough to support our EMS responders, and those who work in rural areas are [particularly underfunded](#). In fact, most of these departments rely on reimbursements from Medicare or Medicaid, which in some rural areas [only reimburse 75 percent](#) of what it costs to transport a patient, and don't cover anything if a patient is treated on-site.

EMS departments face [many of the same challenges](#) that fire departments do: high turnover, a lack of new equipment, difficulty hiring and training new recruits, and expensive out-of-pocket training. This means that already stretched-thin departments must do a great deal of work with limited resources. While fire departments have access to underfunded Federal grants for fire response, there is no dedicated funding for EMS. We must address the funding crisis that fire departments and EMS agencies face. That means we must [significantly increase funding for our fire departments](#) and we must establish a program dedicated to funding EMS.

Last year, the American Rescue Plan included \$500 million for [Emergency Rural Health Care](#) grants, recognizing the tremendous need to support rural health systems during the pandemic. But we must do more to support our rural health systems so they are set up for success in the long-term. Let's be clear: in many communities, these EMS departments are the difference between life and death, and we must do all we can to ensure that they are fully staffed, equipped, and able to respond to emergencies in a timely manner.

The EMS Staffing and Support Act would:

- Authorize and appropriate \$500 million to establish a program in the Health Resources and Services Administration which would allow organizations providing emergency medical services to apply for grants to:
 - Hire personnel
 - Recruit and retain volunteers
 - Provide training or reimbursement for training
 - Implement apprenticeship programs
 - Purchase new equipment, vehicles, and medical supplies
 - Support the well-being of EMS personnel
 - Improve station facilities
 - Improve regional coordination
 - Establish community paramedicine or mobile integrated health care initiatives
- Require the Secretary of HHS to provide Congress a report detailing the challenges, disparities, and inadequacies in providing Federal and private reimbursement for emergency medical services and recommend action.

- Require the Secretary of HHS to provide Congress a report detailing the challenges specific to rural EMS departments and to nonaffiliated EMS departments, and develop an action plan to address those challenges through grants and other administrative action.