



February 15, 2011

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The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Vice President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20504

Dear Mr. Vice President:

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees represents over 45,000 emergency services workers, many of whom work as paramedics and emergency medical technicians at the state and local level.

Emergency medical services (EMS) are a crucial part of the health care system as well as a key component for preparedness and response. There is growing evidence that the quality of pre-hospital medical services directly impacts patient outcomes.

Dedicated emergency medical technicians, paramedics and 911 call takers all play a part in the timeliness and success of emergency medical care. But in many areas EMS services are highly fragmented. Requirements for training and staffing differ from state to state. Equipment availability and maintenance often hinges on local funding. Lack of qualified paramedics can hinder a community's ability to provide advance life support and its ability to respond to man-made and natural disasters is diminished.

The 2006 Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, the *Future of Emergency Care: Emergency Medical Services at the Crossroads*, provided an eye opening view of some of the systemic problems within pre-hospital care. It noted insufficient coordination, disparities in response times, and lack of readiness for disasters as some of the systemic problems facing us today. It states "government leadership in emergency care is fragmented and consistent" and advocates for a lead federal agency to support EMS. AFSCME agrees that a strong lead agency role could improve emergency medical services and endorses the recommendations from the white paper *Consolidated Federal Leadership for Emergency Medical Services* submitted by the National EMS Labor Alliance and the International Association of EMS Chiefs. The paper recommends that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) be that lead agency, expanding on its current role and using existing authority under the Homeland Security Act. Placing a lead agency role within DHS will also provide stability and coordination as well as consistent funding needed to truly address the concerns of the IOM report.

On behalf of our members, thank you for the opportunity to share our views on this important matter.

Sincerely,

LEE A. SAUNDERS
International Secretary-Treasurer

GERALD W. McENTEE
International President

GWMcE/LAS:ejr

Enclosure

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO

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