

May 6, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra:

The members of the American Ambulance Association (AAA) are extremely grateful for the assistance provided thus far by the Administration and the Congress to address the unprecedented negative financial impact of COVID-19 on ground ambulance service providers and suppliers. Our frontline healthcare responders, however, urgently need more funds to offset the increased costs and lower revenue resulting from our vital response to the pandemic. Our ability to provide high quality emergency medical services to patients across the country is in peril. I therefore respectfully request that ground ambulance service providers and suppliers receive at least 5% from the remaining monies in the Provider Relief Fund and the additional \$8.5 billion allocated for rural health care providers under the American Rescue Plan.

Recent articles in the New York Times entitled “Rural Ambulance Crews Have Run Out of Money and Volunteers” dated April 25 and ProPublica entitled “The Broken Front Line” dated April 7 have outlined the problems facing our nation’s emergency medical service (EMS) systems particularly in rural America. Prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE), many EMS systems in the U.S. were already struggling financially due to chronic inadequate reimbursement and are now on the brink of collapse. It is critical that we not let the financial hardship caused by the pandemic to permanently deteriorate our EMS systems, especially in rural areas where an ambulance service maybe the only emergency medical service provider, and ensure that all Americans continue to have access to vital emergency 9-1-1 and medically necessary non-emergency ground ambulance services.

We greatly appreciate the waiver just issued by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to reimburse ground ambulance service providers and suppliers for treatment in place services. The waiver applies to emergency ground ambulance services furnished in response to a 911 or equivalent call in which a transport would have occurred if not for a community-wide EMS protocol resulting from the COVID-19 PHE. While the waiver will help provide partial relief to ambulance service providers and suppliers in some of the hardest hit areas of the country, it does not address the increased costs and lower reimbursement that all our members are facing.

The cost of personal protection equipment (PPE) and decontamination of ambulances after each transport, overtime pay, and other expenses increased significantly as a result COVID-19. Our members respond to every call prepared as if the patient has COVID-19. At the same time, we have seen a sharp decline in the normal response and transport volume as Americans stay at home and are reluctant to call 9-1-1 for non-COVID-19 medical emergencies and as hospitals delayed non-elective surgeries and related medically necessary transports. Simply put, our members are facing increasing costs as they expend the resources necessary to address COVID-19, while their revenue from treating and transporting patients during different peaks of the public health emergency (PHE) has decreased.

We recommend distributing the remaining Provider Relief Funds using the same formula used under Tranche 3 but with at least 5% or approximately \$1.425 billion of the funding made available specifically for ground ambulance service providers and suppliers. Last year, the AAA determined our industry needed \$2.89 billion to cover the increased costs and decreased revenue during just the initial period of the PHE. The \$2.89 billion reflects \$48,000 per ambulance with an estimated 60,000 registered vehicles as calculated through an analysis of the financial impact of the pandemic on our members. We estimate we have received approximately \$1.35 to \$1.5 billion of that funding so far. We ask that you help ensure that ground ambulance service providers and suppliers in rural and urban areas receive the necessary vital additional funding.

Thank you in advance for continuing to help ensure that ground ambulance service providers and suppliers and our paramedics and EMTs have the resources necessary to continue caring for our patients in their moment of greatest need, while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and maintaining the short and long-term viability of EMS in America.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Shawn Baird', with a large, stylized circular flourish at the end.

Shawn Baird
President

About the American Ambulance Association

The AAA is the primary association for ground ambulance service suppliers/providers, including governmental entities, volunteer services, private for-profit, private not-for-profit, and hospital-based ambulance services. Our members provide emergency and non-emergency medical transportation services to more than 75 percent of the U.S. population. AAA members serve patients in all 50 states and provide services in urban, rural, and super-rural areas. As the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration identified in its 2013 report on emergency services, EMS-only systems – such as our members – provide the vast majority of emergency ambulance services throughout America.