

4/24/2009

Governor Corzine,

Yesterday I learned that you made an executive decision to redirect dedicated money from the Emergency Medical Technician Training Fund in the amount of \$4 million dollars to the general fund to assist with the growing economic problems in NJ.

As the President of the New Jersey State First Aid Council, NJSFAC, a taxpayer, a citizen, and a volunteer EMT for 28 years, I must respectfully and strongly discourage you from doing so. These funds are crucial to maintaining the financial stability of the volunteer first aid and rescue squads of NJ.

Every volunteer EMS agency across NJ is acutely aware of the current economic climate. We are all being asked to do more with less. As you and I try to come to grips with this, one constant has remained. The members of the NJSFAC have continued to provide volunteer service to the residents of NJ with no bill. 80 years ago this organization started and continued to build the finest and largest volunteer ambulance system in the nation. NJ has the oldest BLS system in the nation. Doing more with less has always been the standard operating procedure of the volunteers.

- Many squads purchase the ambulances and maintain the equipment with little or no support from their municipality but rely on donations or squad fund raisers
 - Many squads own and maintain their own buildings with little or no support from the municipality but rely on donations or squad fund raisers
 - Purchasing the band aids has now given way to purchasing much more expensive items such as defibrillators, epi-pens, \$12,000.00 power-lift stretchers and other first aid supplies through activities like bake sales, tricky trays or just begging on corners or at the local grocery store.
 - Until the lights and sirens go on, volunteer EMS personnel are transparent in our daily activities as we go about the job of serving our communities.
 - Today this transparency has come back to haunt us to be our new nemesis.
 - We have done such a good job for so long people have just assumed when the call goes out we will come and most of the time that is the case.
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- Please consider the following:
 - In 2007 NJSFAC's 365 member squads
 - Answered 404,489 calls
 - We traveled 5,643,886 miles and using the corporate model of travel reimbursement of \$0.585 per mile = \$3,301,674 JUST IN MILEAGE ALONE.
 - We spent 2,611,898 man hours on calls which if billed at rate of \$12.50 (the entry level EMT rate) would have cost \$32,648,719

- I'll do the math for you, that's about \$35 million dollars without considering the \$117 million dollars to purchase the ambulances, the supplies or any of the fringe benefits!!!

I would like you to consider this option, you walked in and informed the General Assembly of New Jersey with the following "I have good news all the associates are willing to work for free and as part of icing on the cake they would bring all the tools needed to do the job with them". I don't know what the General Assembly would say but my boss would give me a promotion and the corner office with all perks that go with it.

The members of the NJSFAC and other volunteer EMS agencies have done that for 80 years and yet this very system that has worked so successfully is in jeopardy.

- All volunteer members provide services unsalaried, and these services are provided state wide from the small community that responds to fewer than two hundred calls to the large municipality that requires the squad to respond to 3500 calls per year - all with members who donate their time freely.
- The only state wide support volunteer EMS agencies receive is money from the EMT Training Fund and with one executive decision you are taking that away. The impact will be catastrophic. Not only will the volunteers who give freely of their time but they will now have to pay for the training to volunteer.

Collectively, this removal of funding for training and the changes recommended in the system redesign may seriously jeopardize a system that works unless system-wide funding and increased support of the volunteer BLS community is found. Without this, taxes will increase in every community across NJ and will add an additional burden to the already stretched budgets.

Governor, BLS crews respond to every 911 call. Advanced life support (ALS) and fire crews respond only to calls that require their expertise. BLS is an integral part of the emergency response system, the foundation that ensures emergency medical care to every resident. Volunteers are the backbone of New Jersey's EMS response, and must be recognized as such to ensure continued system support. Without volunteers, much like a body without a sturdy musculoskeletal foundation, the system will collapse.

I ask you on behalf of all the volunteer EMTs and all the volunteer EMS agencies in New Jersey reconsider your decision to remove \$4 million dollars from the EMTTF.

Sincerely,

Sue Van Orden

President, NJSFAC