



**TESTIMONY BY  
THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ASSOCIATION OF  
TOWNSHIP SUPERVISORS**

**BEFORE THE  
HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS  
AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**EMERGENCY SERVICES IN PENNSYLVANIA**

**PRESENTED BY**

**JOSEPH H. GERDES III  
DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS**

**MARCH 1, 2022  
HARRISBURG, PA**

4855 Woodland Drive Enola, PA 17025-1291 Internet: [www.psats.org](http://www.psats.org)

PSATS Pennsylvania Township News Telephone: (717) 763-0930 Fax: (717) 763-9732

Trustees Insurance Fund Unemployment Compensation Group Trust Telephone: (800) 382-1268 Fax: (717) 730-0209

Good afternoon, Chairman Boback, Chairman Sainato, and members of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee. My name is Joe Gerdes and I am the Director of Government Relations at the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors (PSATS). Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present remarks on behalf of our association.

PSATS represents Pennsylvania's 1,454 townships of the second class and is committed to preserving and strengthening township government and securing greater visibility and involvement for townships in the state and federal political arenas. Townships of the second class cover 95% of Pennsylvania's land mass and represent more residents — 5.7 million Pennsylvanians — than any other type of political subdivision in the commonwealth.

First, I would personally like to acknowledge the women and men of the emergency services in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, they do an amazing job keeping Pennsylvanians safe every day, most often without much fanfare. As a stroke survivor, I myself have been on the patient side of the equation twice in the past 17 months, both times their care and expertise quite frankly saved my life. I am indebted to a system that worked in my case, a system that works in most cases. I appreciate the leadership of Chairman Boback, this committee, its staff, my colleagues testifying here today, and everyone that is striving to ensure it works for all Pennsylvanians today and in the future.

Under the Second Class Township Code, townships are statutorily required to ensure fire and EMS services are provided to their communities. Our members take this responsibility very

seriously and PSATS advises and educates our membership on best practices to communicate and partner with their emergency services, most of them volunteers, to provide these essential lifesaving services in their communities. In a state that is as large and diverse as Pennsylvania we must caution against trying to apply a one-size-fits-all solution to every municipality or region. We acknowledge that some areas of emergency services, particularly emergency medical services, are stressed and we need these important discussions to look for solutions to help give local governments the tools they need to assist these services quickly.

To be clear, funding is a fundamental challenge but by no means the only issue. To address funding, new revenue raising options would be helpful and enhance a municipality's ability to help to pay for EMS and other emergency services. For example, PSATS members would like to increase the amount of the ambulance tax they can currently levy under the Second Class Township Code from .5 to 1.5 mills. These revenues could only be used to support ambulance companies that service their townships. Also, allowing a municipality to charge a fee to state or federal facilities that operate within the township will help to defray the cost of supplying these services.

Another idea would be to provide municipalities with more options to raise revenues to support their emergency services organizations. Municipalities currently do not have many options, just broad-based taxes, such as the real estate and earned income tax, and the local services tax, which is up to \$52 on those who work in a municipality. An increase in the ambulance tax, as I just mentioned, would be a positive step in the right direction.

Training requirements and costs associated with certification are also an area of concern. Perhaps a program to provide tuition credits to Pennsylvania students to receive these certifications at Pennsylvania colleges and universities would help to attract the personnel needed in these services. Another option to consider is to work with public high schools and vocational-technical schools to offer EMS training and certifications to the next generation of emergency service providers.

We have also heard from stakeholders about the requirements of training, both for new certifications and continuing education. While we certainly want our EMTs and paramedics to be well-trained, perhaps the levels of training need to be revisited to see if additional levels of certification would be appropriate or if there are alternative ways of offering some of the training and certifications. We need more individuals willing to serve and maybe providing tiers of training or certifications would be helpful, as well as commonwealth support for training costs.

Another area of concern that we have heard is the level of certifications needed for the ambulance itself and the items that are needed to meet the qualifications for basic life support and advanced life support and that the cost of this has led to some ambulance companies being unable to provide service and disband, putting more stress on neighboring communities to pick up the slack. These requirements should be reviewed to determine what is necessary for the various levels of service.

Also, legislation is needed to ensure that insurance payments for ambulance services are paid directly to the ambulance company, rather than the patient. While legislation attempted to

address this issue, it is not working as intended because in some instances the in-network reimbursement payment that the ambulance must accept is so low that the ambulance decides to take the risk and directly bill the patient rather than accept the in-network reimbursement rates direct from the insurance companies. This means that the insurance companies end up paying the patient directly, rather than the ambulance service, and the ambulance service must collect directly from the patient. Certainly, billing practices and the level of payment for these services are a critical area for consideration by the committee.

There have also been conversations that PSATS has weighed in on, which have proposed a county public safety authority as a means to raise revenues for these facilities. We are concerned that these proposals may not be flexible enough to allow for one, two or more municipalities the option to form an authority so that multiple entities could be established if desired and not just one county authority. Again, a one-size-fits-all solution does not work in Pennsylvania as different areas have different needs and expectations from their emergency services. A toolbox with a variety of options would be the best option.

Finally, working on efforts to recruit and retain the personnel needed for all our emergency services is vital to keeping the system staffed so that when the alarm is sounded, there is someone to answer.

PSATS will continue to work with you to help find options to fortify our emergency services in the Commonwealth, again thank you for allowing us to offer remarks on behalf of our membership.