

# Sen. Marklein: Responding to the First Responders: continuing to support rural EMS

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I recently completed a series of four rural EMS summits to reconnect with the volunteers who serve our communities in rural EMS departments. My goal was to follow-up on discussions that started in 2019, review legislation we worked on previously and discuss ideas for future solutions.

Over the last month, I visited with 46 people who represented 21 departments. Several leaders in EMS Administration and elected officials joined us too. Representatives Travis Tranel (R-Cuba City) and Tony Kurtz (R- Wonewoc) joined me for several of the discussions. We held summits in Lancaster, Darlington, Muscoda and Elroy. First and foremost, thank you to everyone who attended the summits to share input and ideas with us. We appreciate your willingness to give us your valuable time.

We started each summit with a review of legislation and budget initiatives that we worked on in the last legislative session. Since 2019, we have increased funding for the Funding Assistance Program (FAP) that provides financial resources to EMS departments. We also moved the needle on making the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians (NREMT) exam optional and began clearing up administrative issues related to the FAP.

We then asked attendees for input on several ongoing issues before asking for new ideas. We discussed everything from staffing on ambulances to certification and refresher requirements to the role of the statewide EMS Association. We talked about continuing our work to make the NREMT test optional for Emergency Medical Responders (EMR) at the discretion of the local EMS department and we sought

innovative solutions to solve problems.

The open-ended discussion is where we heard a lot about the ongoing challenges of recruitment and retention. In many cases, it's not about money. It's about people. Many of our local departments cannot recruit volunteers to take the classes to become first responders and then serve on call.

I am still trying to understand why we have a lack of volunteers and what, if anything, we can do about it? Is it a societal issue? A cultural issue? Why don't people volunteer for these jobs? I know we all want to have an ambulance come when we dial 911, but who is going to drive it and help us if nobody steps up?

My team and I are now working to distill all of the input and ideas we gathered at these summits as we continue to work on these issues. Following are some of the ideas and plans we have already begun to put into motion:

- I plan to connect with the technical college system to talk about training and testing opportunities.
- I plan to revisit the NREMT exam waiver bill and improve it.
- I plan to look for ways to financially support small, rural EMS departments.
- I am studying options to provide financial support for volunteers.
- I am seeking your input to understand why we are having such difficulty recruiting volunteers. Please share your ideas.

I will continue to work on this issue and seek ways to help our rural EMS departments to provide the service and response that we need in our communities. Again, I sincerely appreciate the time and effort of every volunteer who joined us for a summit. If you were unable to participate, but have ideas or concerns, please do not hesitate to connect with me to provide input, ideas or to seek assistance. Send an email to [sen.marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:sen.marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov) or call 608-266-0703. I want to hear from you.