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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 59TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Emergency Medical Services in Rural Wisconsin

Providing emergency medical services (EMS) to rural Wisconsin communities has always been a challenge, but more so in recent years. There are a variety of reasons for this problematic trend. While the ability for our EMS agencies to provide greater care prior to transport has been evolving, the ability to recruit and retain trained personnel has been on the decline. It is difficult to convince a volunteer to dedicate several months to classroom training, only to be followed by the need to remain in the community when covering ambulance duty. As a currently practicing emergency medical technician (EMT), I can attest to this time commitment. Had I not completed my training a decade and a half ago, it is highly unlikely that I would have the privilege to serve my community in this capacity today.

A few weeks ago, I co-chaired the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety during a hearing that addressed rural EMS ambulance staffing concerns. By law, the lowest level of emergency professional that can staff an ambulance is an EMT. A minimum of two fully qualified EMTs are required to transport a patient to the hospital. Because of this requirement, the Village of Kewaskum, for example, provides EMT ambulance service for some of the nearby communities including Boltonville and Kohlsville. Although these fire departments do have emergency personnel, the First Responders have a lower skill set and less training than EMTs. Assembly Bill 213, authored by Representative Jeff Mursau (R-Crivitz), will provide relief for rural departments like Kewaskum by allowing a first responder to take the place of one of the EMTs onboard the ambulance. Per current practice, if a higher level of care is needed at the scene or on the way to the hospital, additional, nearby resources are called, including helicopter transportation or a nearby paramedic level agency.

As your representative and as an EMT, I am looking forward to voting in support of this bill when it comes to the floor of the Assembly this fall.