



FORT WAYNE CITY COUNCIL

Office of the Common Council

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June 2, 2022

Via email: eric.lahey@cityoffortwayne.org

Chief Eric Lahey
Fort Wayne Fire Department
1 East Main Street
Fort Wayne, IN 46802

Dear Chief Lahey:

Thank you for the ongoing leadership that you provide the Fort Wayne Fire Department. I appreciate the thoughtfulness you show as a public safety leader. As you are aware, members of the Allen County Fire Chiefs Association have reached out to Fort Wayne City Council members expressing concern regarding the number of ambulance runs they are making into the City of Fort Wayne. I have enclosed a copy of their letter dated May 22. While meeting with Chief Boren on May 20th and the County Chiefs on May 24th, they expressed some of their members are considering declining mutual aid calls. They also cautioned that their resources are being taxed to the point where all of their ambulances could be in use and may not be able to send another requested ambulance into the City of Fort Wayne.

Chief Boren and the Chiefs reiterated that, in their opinion, FWFD should position itself to transport patients in level zero situations. If you recall, I presented to you an email from the New Haven Fire Department January 28 outlining their suggestion on how to do so, and we discussed the matter. I have enclosed that email. The Chiefs have indicated that movement on this issue would be seen as a tremendous act of good faith and would likely reduce the momentum building against continuing to provide ambulance in Fort Wayne.

Given the County Chief's warnings about mutual aid ending by their choice or by them running out of resources to offer, I believe a formal question and response regarding FWFD's ability to transport at level zero is warranted. If it is indeed prudent for FWFD to move in that direction it would likely save lives. If FWFD should not deem it prudent to move in that direction, a thoughtful response should assist in restoring the good faith needed.

Would you please respond to the transportation suggestion within the next ten days? Please note how long it would likely take for State approval, new insurance costs, CBA concerns or any other substantive reasons FWFD should not be prepared to help transport (at least until the end of the year, by which TRAA will presumably announce system changes). Would additional fire fighters need to be staffed if an ambulance was placed at their station, or can transporting be done with a four-person crew?

I would be happy to meet and discuss any of the issues presented in this letter or clarify any questions. I appreciate your time and consideration of this matter of great importance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Jehl". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Russell Jehl
Fort Wayne City Council, 2nd District

CC: Mayor Tom Henry, Fort Wayne
Chief Robert Boren, Huntertown
Joel Benz, TRAA
Jeremy Bush, IAFF
Fort Wayne City Council members



Jointly Serving the Citizens of Allen County, Indiana

May 2, 2022

Councilman Jehl,

On behalf of the Allen County Fire Chiefs Association, we would like to express our concerns regarding the deficiencies of the Three Rivers Ambulance Authority. These deficiencies directly affect emergency responses to both City and County constituents. TRAA's lack of ambulances on the street overwhelms their system and, in many cases, results in them calling for County ambulances to cover your district. The County has been running into the City of Fort Wayne for over a year and this has gone well beyond "Mutual Aid". This has negatively affected all resources in the following ways:

1. It depletes County ambulances out of the areas that they are supposed to be protecting
2. It puts added stress on our crews mentally and physically
3. This is a safety issue anytime we respond "Lights and Sirens"
4. Your residence are not getting an ambulance within a timely manner due to the distance in which they are responding from (sometimes taking up to 25mins)
5. FWFD crews are out of service waiting for a county ambulance to arrive and transfer care

The County services have been subsidizing the TRAA EMS system for well over a year and all of our residents and staff deserve better! We have met several times with TRAA director Joel Benz as well as Michael Bureau, with Paramedics Solutions and Chief Operating Officer to ask them to resolve this problem, however, there have been minimal results and we continue to be a permanent "Band Aid" for the Authority's lack of manpower and service. We have been told that the Council members are not completely aware of this dire situation that the Authority has created and felt you should hear it from the Chief's Association. TRAA's issues are creating manpower issues for the County as our units are always in Fort Wayne.

There is no denying that the outlying EMS services in Allen County (County Providers) have been filling in to cover for Three Rivers Ambulance Authority (TRAA) when there are no available ambulances to answer the call for help; aka "Level 0" situations. In fact, over the past 10 months (May '21 - February '22) Allen County ambulances have responded over 1300 times to the City of Fort Wayne when TRAA hasn't had an ambulance available. Out of those 1300 Level 0 calls, roughly 550 have been times where County Providers have transported a city resident to the hospital. The other roughly 750 calls were disregarded and pulled County Providers from their own coverage area, away from their constituents they are sworn to serve. Let it be known that this isn't true mutual aid. There have been times where it has been said that this is just the county helping out TRAA, in the same way that TRAA provides paramedic service for the county. That paramedic service that is provided to the county by TRAA is a part of a contractual agreement stating that in the exchange for selling LifeCare, TRAA will provide the paramedic service to the county ambulances.

For these past 10 months, County Providers have not only been covering the calls for help for the City of Fort Wayne during Level 0 situations, but the Chiefs of these departments have been working to suggest possible options for the City of Fort Wayne, TRAA, and Fort Wayne Fire Department to maximize manpower to help work towards a fix. Yet, we don't feel as if the City of Fort Wayne and the Fort Wayne Fire Department are helping come up with solutions. We all understand that this isn't an overnight fix and may take some time to resolve, but there seems to be a lack of urgency and support from the City of Fort Wayne in this matter.



Jointly Serving the Citizens of Allen County, Indiana

There are several issues at hand that need to be addressed in some form. We would like to sit down and discuss things in greater detail but for now we just want to bring them to your attention. Below is a small list which needs to be addressed:

1. Staffing of ambulances at TRAA
2. Amount of Level 0 calls
3. Proper use of manpower
4. Mental well being of TRAA Medics, County Medics; and Firefighters
5. Delayed/Prolonged/Extended response times for transport of critical patients.
6. Fire trucks, ambulances, and other resources are out of service for their designated areas.
7. Misuse of Resources

Now that you have our perspective, there are a few things **we encourage you** to ask TRAA and FWFD in order for you to get their perspective of how the above situation is affecting your district and constituents:

1. How many level 0 runs have occurred in your council district?
2. Compliance and response times in your council district.
3. What does the Fort Wayne Fire Department have in place to combat these situations?
4. Aside from TRAA, how many paramedics and advanced emts are on duty daily for the Fort Wayne Fire Department to help offset the loss of paramedics from TRAA during level 0 call?

In closing, this is a City problem and thus far, and the only people working to find a solution to this issue have been the county providers. We are hoping that after you read this letter, you have a better understanding of the magnitude of the situation. Public safety needs to be a top priority for the City of Fort Wayne. The County Fire Chiefs have been working toward a solution and we only ask that the City of Fort Wayne put forth just as much effort.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the chief's association at allencofirechiefs@gmail.com to set up a time to sit down and talk. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours in service,
Allen County Fire Chiefs

Russ: Thanks for meeting with us again regarding TRAA and their struggle to provide ambulance service to the citizens of Fort Wayne and the surrounding county when called upon. We talked about several issues and the lack of improvements since this issue was brought to light. Numbers don't lie and by the January numbers alone I hope you realize this system is on life support. As the numbers show between 4 county agencies, we have been dispatched into the city over 200 times so far in January 2022 and this number continues to grow weekly. As stated in our meeting our employees as well as us as leaders see no light at the end of the tunnel. The feeling is that this issue has been swept under the rug over the past couple of months since it originally was brought to the city's attention. Gary's departing was only the start of fixing the system. As we stated in our meeting Joel is a great friend to many of us and we will continue to support him however we must see improvements soon. We are hearing that at their last bump they reduced the number of units on the streets. Was this done to lead city leaders to believe their staffing is getting better with the appearance that the trucks they do have on the streets are fully staffed? Our concern is that they are unable to meet demands now, so will they continue to call us into the city and call it mutual aid so they don't have to pay the county services a fee anymore by claiming that they are fully staffed which in reality it's really because they reduced units on the street. I am also hearing that their new computer automated dispatch center doesn't track compliance. The RFP is based on the providers compliance. This would be worth looking into to ensure that there is a tool in place to gauge their performance instead of them just telling you things are getting better. They continue to lose medics and are currently as of our meeting with Joel down to 16 Paramedics that are assigned to trucks that are working on the streets. This is only 4 per team for a city of roughly 300,000 citizens. There are numerous days where I have more than 4 on a day just for East Central Fire Territory and that's not even enough. Remember that number used to be 24 when this started! There are some Paramedics in their dispatch that haven't made runs for years so they should not be included in their numbers as it pertains to covering the streets. They have included them before in their overall numbers and that is not a true representation as to how many Paramedics they have on the streets. I also know that they have put an EMT class in place recently to try and help fill some of these spots which they tout as a solution. This only turns what used to be a great Paramedic service into a BLS service in the city. This should not be acceptable to city! They deserve better. Numerous Paramedics have left that system simply based on the operation techniques and management staff of this private company. As we talked about in our meeting there needs to be a solution. Here are my thoughts and ideas that possibly could stop or at least drastically cut down on the abuse of the county services. Currently they run a City Fire apparatus on all Priority 1 calls and all Level 0 calls. These apparatuses stay out of service until they either get released by TRAA at the scene or after the county unit shows up which in numerous cases takes 15-20 minutes to arrive on scene. If it is a BLS county service, then in a lot of cases the FWFD will provide the ALS medic for transport to hospital which leaves them one short on their apparatus. On critical runs they may have to send 2 FWFD members to the hospital which pulls their rig out of service until they pick them up at the hospital. As you can tell by these scenarios the FWFD is being used anyway so why don't they utilize their resources more effectively until TRAA gets their system back up and running like it needs to be. This would require TRAA, Paramedics Solutions, FWFD and the FWFD union to all work together to provide this service for the citizens they are sworn to protect and to serve. There are several ambulances sitting in the bay at TRAA daily that are ready for deployment at any time. These entities need to work together and place 5-6 of these ambulances strategically throughout the city in Fire Stations. The FWFD has a hire back program in place to insure minimum manning levels are on duty every day. The Fire Chief could place these ambulances in Fire Stations and have them staffed with an EMT and an ALS medic very easily which would provide instant relief. These units could only be used when TRAA is at Level 0 instead of always relying on the county. The FWFD is receiving a substantial payment from TRAA yearly for their current role in assisting TRAA on priority one runs. They receive far more than any county service will ever receive. They could put an agreement in place with Paramedic

Solutions just like the county services have to allow them to recoup some cost for manpower. Currently the county services receive \$100.00 for a dispatch and \$400.00 per transport from Paramedic Solutions in which we bill monthly. The leaders of these organization's need sit down and resolve this city issue. I hope this gives you a better understanding of a possible solution. Thanks!