



# CITY OF FORT WAYNE

THOMAS C. HENRY, MAYOR

Fire Department • Eric T. Lahey, Fire Chief

June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Councilman Russ Jehl  
200 E. Berry Street  
Suite 120  
Fort Wayne IN 46802

Councilman Jehl,

I wanted to take this opportunity to respond to your recent letter regarding the Fort Wayne Fire Department's (FWFD) services to the community and what role our department plays in partnership with the Three Rivers Ambulance Authority (TRAA).

The FWFD should not be staffing transport ambulances with firefighters. The practice of using firefighters to staff transport ambulances will decrease the number of First Responders on the street and will force overtime shifts on an already overworked department. If some of the County providers no longer want to assist the City, an immediate and efficient solution to this problem is to involve the private sector hospitals who already have transport ambulances and it would directly benefit the community by easing the workload on TRAA.

The FWFD is a non-transport, First Responder, Advanced Life Support, EMS provider in the State of Indiana. As the First Responders within our system, we respond to any life-threatening emergency medical runs within the City of Fort Wayne. These are generally considered to be level 1 priority runs and sometimes level 2 priority runs.

Five years ago, we advanced our level of care from Basic Life Support (BLS) to Advanced Life Support (ALS) and we now have one ALS firefighter assigned to each of our apparatus. As First Responders, the FWFD is equipped and trained to keep patients alive until the ambulance arrives. Moving medics off the engines and onto an ambulance compromises the FWFD's ability to maintain that response and could have a negative impact on patient outcomes.

The City of Fort Wayne is the beneficiary of lower insurance costs because of the FWFD's ability to blanket the City with exceptional fire protection. The blanket of coverage is provided by our 23 fire apparatus which are operated out of our 18 fire stations. The 18 fire stations are positioned to provide the City of Fort Wayne with a four-minute response time. Our ability to respond to that standard, created by the National Fire Protection Association, is one of the criteria that the Insurance Services Organization (ISO) evaluates when determining a City's ISO rating. The City of Fort Wayne currently has an ISO 2 rating, this places us in the top 2% of the 49,000 fire departments evaluated by ISO. If we start down the path of taking our apparatus out of service to staff ambulances, we will negatively affect response times.

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In response to the paramedic shortage at TRAA, which in part is the result of a nationwide shortage of paramedics, the FWFD has agreed to respond to priority 6 runs when TRAA is at level 0 or when TRAA will experience an abnormally high response time. Priority 6 runs are not life-threatening but can be a sign of a greater issue. Responding to these level 0 priority 6 calls for service has increased the FWFD run volume by 6% YTD. Despite your assertion, the FWFD is doing more with less to assist in this changing EMS landscape.

If it becomes necessary to transport a patient for any of the three priorities mentioned above, it may also be necessary for the FWFD medic to ride in the ambulance to the hospital to provide patient care. Removing one firefighter from the apparatus allows us the ability to return that apparatus to service and continue to provide an emergency response in their assigned territory. In April the FWFD assisted TRAA or County providers by providing at least one of our medics on the back of an ambulance on 58 emergency runs. In that same month, the FWFD responded to 1,101 total emergency medical runs and only 21 of those emergency runs required two of our medics on the back of the ambulance which resulted in a FWFD fire truck being temporarily removed from service. On the remaining 1,079 emergency medical runs in which we did not take the apparatus out of service, due to reduced unsafe staffing, we were able to respond to the next emergency call for service.

Every proposed solution that has included FWFD personnel would require apparatus to be taken out of service or require us to increase our staffing levels. Each of these scenarios would either compromise our ability to provide the appropriate fire response or increase the need to mandate forced overtime shifts. The mistakes that were made by the previous leadership at TRAA, which includes the contractor, regarding employee retention are not the responsibility of the FWFD and should not be resolved at the expense, well-being, or safety of our firefighters and our citizens. Article 19, Section 5 of our CBA requires that we staff each one of our apparatus with four firefighters. This same section prevents the FWFD from responding on emergency runs with less than three firefighters. The minimum manning requirement in the CBA is something I fought for and was supported by the IAFF Local 124. The basis for having four firefighters on every apparatus can be found in OSHA's rule 1910.134 otherwise known as the "Two In-Two Out" rule. This rule requires that we have two firefighters on the outside of a structure for every two firefighters that make entry into a structure involving an atmosphere that is immediately dangerous to life or health. It is also referenced in the National Fire Protection Association's 1710 Standard.

As a TRAA Board member, I can assure you that the City has been and will continue to be involved in helping TRAA find a solution. Just last week, I attended a meeting hosted by Councilman Arp. This meeting included key decision-makers and the discussion was focused on attainable solutions that did not require us to compromise any other City service. The Mayor and the County Commissioners continue to be supportive and they are currently waiting for Joel Benz to analyze TRAA's financial need to pay the medics a higher wage. This analysis will be the basis for a request for financial assistance from both the County and the City. Joel will also be participating in meetings with our local hospital systems who might be able to provide some immediate relief to the inundated TRAA system.

I know that in your earlier involvement you took issue with the hurdles created by the CBA, specifically the restrictions on part-time employment. On Tuesday, June 7, the stakeholders met to discuss eliminating those hurdles. Joel can update you on that issue and the progress he has made with removing the cap on part-time employment at TRAA.

Over 60% of the FWFD's calls for service are for non-EMS emergency runs. This is very different from the County fire department's EMS to fire run ratio and probably why they don't fully understand the consequences if we started removing firefighters from the fire response and placing them in an ambulance.

There is only one logical conclusion to this problem. TRAA needs to review its decades-old operating system and identify ways to adjust to the reimbursement effects of the Affordable Care Act. This is why TRAA has engaged the services of a consultant that will help them identify those long-term solutions. One thoughtful and apolitical approach would be to integrate the private sector assets of our community; the hospitals. The hospitals have a financial interest in providing non-emergent patient transport. Why not let them do patient transports so the TRAA ambulances can be available for emergent medical needs?

The men and women of the FWFD have done their part during this situation, and to suggest otherwise is disrespectful to the work our firefighters do every day and to the lives they save. My firefighters are needed for the City of Fort Wayne's emergency fire response and as First Responders in the Emergency Medical System established by ordinance and the inter-local agreement. We accomplish this mission over 25,000 times a year. There is no reason to change the FWFD's response plan that works for a myriad of emergency types because our ambulance provider has experienced a staffing shortage. The Mayor agrees with my decision, the IAFF Local 124 agrees with my decision, the Council members that I have met with agree with my decision and Joel Benz understands and agrees with my decision. You and some of the County Fire Chiefs appear to be the only ones that don't agree with my decision. Our community needs to evolve and work collaboratively to identify the right system for our residents, neighborhoods, and businesses. They deserve the very best from the people they depend on to be there to put out a fire, perform a rescue, or respond to other emergency situations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eric Lahey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Eric" and last name "Lahey" clearly legible.

Eric Lahey  
Fire Chief