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IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM IEMSA PRESIDENT

The Iowa Emergency Medical Services Association would like to discuss further Clark Kauffman's articles published in the Sunday, April 7 edition of the Des Moines Register. IEMSA proudly represents both the paid and volunteer, as well as the taxpayer-funded and private EMS services across Iowa. The breadth of our membership allows us to view the crucial issues facing the EMS profession in our state from a variety of perspectives. IEMSA has long advocated for EMS to be considered an "essential service" at all levels of local government. We believe that this is the root of many of the problems raised in the articles. Our brothers and sisters in law enforcement and fire protection receive this distinction (and the funding that goes with it), while EMS does not. We have been asking the Legislature to address this for years, and hopefully these articles will bring this grave disparity further attention. Until this happens, not all Iowans can avail themselves of the benefits of ambulance service when they call 911. For example, many municipal EMS programs have been subsumed into the fire departments; however, those economies of scale may not benefit residents of townships or unincorporated areas, which are not required to provide EMS to their citizens. Those that do provide EMS in smaller communities work tirelessly every day to find funding, equipment and personnel. While the spirit of the EMS Volunteers in our state is unmatched, it is a shame that the financial support to provide emergency medical care to Iowans in some communities is contingent on an annual chili supper, bake sale or other such type of fundraiser. Iowans deserve better than that. We have been opposed on this request by organizations representing some local governments claiming that this is an unfunded mandate. Of course this is a mandate on local governments - it should be. What is the purpose of a local government if it is not going to provide public safety to those in its jurisdiction? Public safety is one of the first reasons people form governments. You might feel content in your home in West Des Moines knowing that the EMS is only a few minutes away, but what happens if you are in a car accident in rural Iowa? Can you really afford to wait 30 minutes to an hour at that point? In the state of Iowa, volunteerism is a key component of public safety. Our rural EMS services in Iowa have been struggling for years to develop and maintain the staffing levels necessary to run their programs. It's easy to choose between a fully-trained volunteer with a spotless background and one with some history of criminal or civil mischief, and our volunteer departments do make the right choices every day. While the dedication and commitment of the volunteers in our state is second to none, the individual sacrifice is beginning to fall short in some communities today, leaving them vulnerable. This is also an issue that needs further discussion, and a true commitment of those. It is absolutely crucial for Iowans to understand the deep-rooted structural problems that EMS faces in our great state. Mr. Kauffman's article shows the wide variety of issues facing an under-funded and under-staffed EMS system in Iowa. In fact, two bills were introduced this year (SF 346 and HF 347) that would have created a task force to review the many problems facing EMS and propose solutions to try and answer the very questions Mr. Kauffman raises. We hope the Legislature can help us address these concerns, because the future of so many Iowans depends on it.

Sincerely, Jerry Ewers President Iowa Emergency Medical Services Association