

City of Gilroy

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Jimmy Forbis
City Administrator

October 17, 2023

Mr. James R. Williams, County Executive
70 West Hedding Street
11th Floor
San Jose, CA 95110

RE: County Ambulance Crisis Detrimental to the Community of Gilroy

Mr. Williams,

The City of Gilroy is experiencing a substantial burden as a result critical shortage of available county-contracted American Medical Response (AMR) paramedic ambulances to the south county area. Under the current county contract, AMR is required to respond to emergencies within 12 minutes at least 90 percent of the time into urban areas of the county. However, AMR's response times significantly surpass this threshold to the south county area with response times exceeding 30 minutes or longer. These extended response times, and the corresponding shortage of available county ambulances into the City of Gilroy, create substantial on-scene wait times by the Gilroy Fire Department. These excessive wait times prevent the fire department from responding to the next pending emergency. Our community, as a result, is paying a detrimental price.

The current ambulance crisis has no apparent reduction in the near or distant future. On a daily basis, the Santa Clara County Emergency Medical Services Agency issues "Standard Dispatch Order #17" that suspends ALL automatic dispatches for county ambulances until the first-due Gilroy fire engine crew arrives on the scene and determines the acuity of the patient. It is only at that point that the Gilroy fire captain can then request the dispatch of the closet available county ambulance. This only further extends our on-scene time while we wait for the next available ambulance, which sometimes responds from as far as away as Mountain View. The crisis then perpetuates itself by forcing us into untenable situations in which all our Gilroy fire resources are tied up on medical emergency incidents. The excessively long response times by county ambulance (sometimes 30 minutes or longer) prevent us from responding to our next local call for help.

Three years ago, the county compounded the situation in south county by unilaterally modifying the AMR ambulance contract to decrease AMR's late response time penalties. Prior to the contract modification, AMR was held to performance response time standard of 12 minutes at least 90 percent of the time for each of the 5 separate geographic zones designated throughout the county (including south county). However, the current contractual modification as it applies to response time penalties will only accrue if system-wide (all geographic zones combined) compliance is below 92 percent.

This change has disincentivized county ambulances from responding into south county in a timely manner, and in turn has left our community underserved and, at times, unprotected.

As the county ambulance shortage continues unabated, the county's attempts to bridge the ambulance gap with basic life support (BLS) ambulances only further exacerbates the situation. BLS ambulances frequently require the Gilroy fire department engine crew to give up its only firefighter-paramedic member to accompany the patient in the back of the ambulance to the hospital. This places an extraordinary burden on the engine crew since they must respond to the next emergency without the benefit of their firefighter-paramedic member and with only a crew of two. This obviously minimizes their safety and effectiveness in any emergency incident until their firefighter-paramedic has returned from the hospital to the engine crew. The return of the firefighter-paramedic from the hospital can take anywhere from one to three hours after the transport is completed.

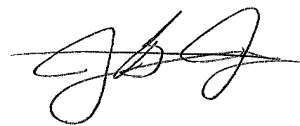
The County needs to seek short-term and long-term solutions to the county ambulance crisis. We believe that an AMR contractual change back to the original performance response time standard of 12 minutes at least 90 percent of the time for each of the 5 separate geographic zones should be initiated as soon as possible. Secondly, since there is a shortage of paramedics working for AMR, providing funding to other ambulance providers as an incentive to participate in the county's 9-1-1 system may deliver better coverage for the south county area. There are other options yet unexplored, but only if the County chooses to identify the situation as an ongoing 'crisis' and is willing to take concerted action to secure the resources and solutions needed to alleviate it.

As the City Administrator and the Fire Chief, we find the unmitigated burden placed on our city and its residents to bear the burden of significant county ambulance response times into our community to be unacceptable and detrimental. The County must bear the ultimate responsibility as the contracting entity and regulatory agency for recognizing the county ambulance system as a failed 9-1-1 essential service and develop a truly concerted and effective plan to fix it.

Respectfully Submitted,



Jimmy Forbis, Administrator
City of Gilroy



Jim Wyatt, Fire Chief
City of Gilroy