

I want to start by saying I am not here to ruffle feathers or create enemies. It is hard in a small town to speak up for what you feel is right because of the backlash that comes with it, but our EMS service is crumbling, and without someone willing to speak up, it will never change. I want to share some insight into being an EMT in Wayne County. Over the past year, I have been on some hard calls. I transported a young mother recently, and I knew as we pulled out of the driveway and saw her children get off the bus with an ambulance leaving their home that there was a good possibility their mother would never come home, and she didn't. Not soon after, I responded to a call for a laboring mother. This baby was coming and wasn't waiting for anyone. As we drove over the mountain, I prayed that this baby would not be born before we got to the hospital, and if it was, I prayed that I could do enough to ensure that that baby went home with its family. I watched my colleagues mourn over the loss of a young child during a time that was supposed to be joyous. I watched them beat themselves up for not doing enough, knowing they did everything they could for that family. Then, our most recent call. These fantastic EMTs tried everything they could on the floor of a young father's home to bring this dad back to his kids. Then, waited at the ambulance shed with his body for the mortuary to arrive so his wife and children did not have to endure more emotional trauma.

I have worked in healthcare for over 20 years. I have been in doctors' offices, emergency rooms, labor and delivery, med surg, and surgery, and I have never seen a more selfless group of individuals than we have in our Wayne County EMS and all emergency services, for that matter. These people drop everything to answer a call that most run from. They miss family events, birthdays, holidays, camping trips, dinners with their family, and so much more to serve this county with no acknowledgment. There are even more examples that I could give you of this team's dedication and heart, but there is not enough time in this meeting for that.

In April of 2022, EMS members were requested to sign a contract stating we would commit to 96 hours of on-call time per month and at least one weekend per month, or we would be reprimanded or dismissed from EMS. We lost several valuable EMTs who had irreplaceable knowledge. These individuals, although unable to commit to the required contract, could have filled holes in the schedule to ease the burden of others. We have been told countless times that we are county employees and have an obligation to our community. I am not in EMS for the money. It is not about the dollar sign. I am in EMS because I care about our community's well-being, but I also care about the value that is held to all emergency services. Here, people are going into very high-stress situations for very little pay. In 2022, I was on call for 1178 hours and had 16 calls, 6 of which were critical patients. This includes five federal holidays and 18 weekend days. With EMS, I made \$3,214 and no benefits. If we don't account for the calls, that amounts to \$2.73 per hour. Now let me ask you if you would knowingly put yourself into high-stress situations where it is literally life or death for \$2.73 an hour? To me, that sounds a bit like insanity. So why do we do it? We do it because we care about our community and the outcomes of the people in it. We do it because no one else will.

The main problem doesn't lie in the money it lies in the support we get. When I sit down and think, why can't we fill the schedule? Here is what I came up with.

1. Leadership turnover has been very difficult for the EMS members. During my tenure as an EMT, we have had four different EMS directors. All of which had been doing two jobs. One as EMS director and one as an EMT. These people have been run ragged. They are on call even when they are not on call. They have to fill in where everyone else can't. They get burned out or pushed out just as we gain momentum and feel like a team again. As our last director exited, there was radio silence from the commissioners. We knew nothing. The rug has essentially been pulled out from underneath us. Our leadership is gone, and we have no idea when or if anyone will replace her.
2. EMTs do this on the side to help out. Most have full-time jobs that pay their mortgage, buy groceries, and support their families. Not to mention provide their benefits. In this economy, most of us can't afford to leave our jobs during the day to run on the ambulance because one call takes at least 3 hours out of our workday, and we are not compensated even close to what we get at our regular jobs. Not to mention the risk of being let go because when we leave, productivity goes down, and business is lost. Employers will only allow that for so long, no matter who the employer is. Currently, you have four active advanced, four active basics, and two active drivers. Several people have pulled their names off the calendar since Kassie left. I am unaware of whether these members will be returning or not. Personally, I am not willing to risk my job or the license I worked and continue to work towards for a service that is unwilling to back me.
3. Then, we lost more valuable leadership, our medical directors. Daniel specifically was a lifeline for our EMS team. He showed up on calls. He was available to us day or night when we needed some guidance. He even took a job at the hospital in Richfield to build his emergency knowledge and help build a relationship with the two teams. He would come to crew meetings and do case reviews to help all of us learn how to improve our skills and make the next call even better. Now we have nothing. Dr. Brown has shown up for one crew meeting. No one knows how to get ahold of him, and he is the person who is supposed to help guide our care and help us improve. One of our longest-standing EMTs almost lost her license this past week because he hadn't approved her renewal. We are carrying medications that are no longer considered standard of care, which is putting our patients at a disadvantage if living in a rural community is not a disadvantage enough.
4. There is no valuable training. As EMTs go out on difficult calls, they are left with what they know, and if they do not receive regular valuable training, then the care of the patient will suffer. Individuals will burn out quickly. We have yet to be trained on the new charting system and have muddled our way through it, hoping we fill in the right boxes.
5. Support. In my opinion, EMS and all emergency services in Wayne County have little to no support. I have seen a commissioner at a crew meeting fewer times than I can count on one hand, and when they have been there, it was because there was a problem with us. The one time I went to the commissioners with a very serious problem, I was told it would be taken care of, but it wasn't. I didn't and don't feel supported. I feel like no one is looking out for our best interests.

6. Our next generation of EMTs is not there. People don't want to volunteer their time and energy and risk their mental health without something in return. We have to make a change, or ten years from now or possibly sooner, there won't be anyone there to answer the calls.

The big picture is that the county needs to do more for its emergency service members. Members need to be compensated fairly for their time. You can't ask people to leave their jobs and take a hit financially. It's just not feasible in this economy. You must invest in quality training so our EMTs feel prepared to respond when the community needs them. You have got to hire quality leadership and get them help. You must have good medical directors who are up on evidence-based treatments and available to your teams. We need medical directors who review protocols yearly and update them as new evidence arises. If money is needed, I heard a grant writer is on staff to help fill that need.

Here is what I have come up with for a suggested solution. Hire a quality EMS director and allow a current EMT to sit in on the interviews to give you a good insight into the candidates. The new director should not run day-to-day on the ambulance. They need to be in the office getting billing out, applying for grants, recruiting, meetings, and ensuring day-to-day operations happen. To allow for this, you should hire two full-time EMTs. Each takes three 12-hour shifts per week during the day. Your weekdays are at least covered by an advanced. These individuals would be responsible for ordering, restocking, maintenance on the sheds and ambulance, and training for the other EMTs. This would take some of the load off of the volunteers. I would dare bet you could get the help you needed to fill the rest of the schedule if it was shown that the county is willing to invest in EMS. If this is not an option, I urge you to think outside the box to fill the weekday schedule. Could you hire a full-time emergency management and a full-time EMS director who are both Advanced EMTs they would rotate weeks of being on call during the day. Again, this would allow advance availability for calls during the workday and allow the volunteers to pick up the nights and weekends.

Lastly, you guys have to show up. You have to show your support for our emergency services. Jump on some runs. See what we do. Understand the complexity and the mental toll it takes to do this job. Come to our crew meetings and get to know the wonderful people who selflessly give their time. I would actually challenge each of you to join each of the emergency services teams. Go on a search and see what those men and women do. See what it is like to recover a body after days of searching. Go on a ride-along with your sheriff's deputies. See the situations they are forced to go into. You would be surprised by the time and effort required to do their job. But also see the good because even though I have talked about the bad today, there is good in this. There are successes. All service members from EMS, fire, search and rescue, and deputies have saved lives and changed things for the better, but you don't get to see all the good unless you show up and get involved.

As representatives of our county, I ask you to make a change because I am afraid that if you don't, those who are doing the work now will be gone, and there won't be others to replace them. Personally, I cannot continue to risk my job, career, and mental health if there is no

movement towards a better EMS service. I am committed to continue helping where and when I can until there is a resolution or I am shown that a resolution is not probable. We are coming into the busiest season for EMS, and I hope it doesn't take the life of someone you love before you realize that something needs to change.