

Butler Eagle -8-13- 2025 - Butler Ambulance Calls Upon Municipalities for Financial Help

Half-mill EMS tax suggested

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Butler Ambulance Service responds to a report of an accidental shooting Wednesday night at the Clearview Mall in Center Township.

PENN Township— Emergency medical services in Pennsylvania have been stretched to the financial breaking point in recent years and the Butler Ambulance Service is calling on its member municipalities for help.

Jesse Haas, a paramedic with the Butler Ambulance Service, made a presentation to the Penn Township Board of Supervisors during their monthly meeting on Tuesday night, August 12th, on the difficulty of running an ambulance service in Pennsylvania in 2025.

Haas said his presentation to Penn Township marked at least his sixth presentation to a municipal government out of the 15 municipalities covered by Butler Ambulance Service.

"Historically, we've been operating in the background," Haas said. "We just do what we do and do it well and try to be as minimal a burden to municipalities as possible. Unfortunately, the way that EMS and public safety is going, that's no longer the case."

According to Haas, the Butler Ambulance Service is on pace to respond to 10,000 emergency calls in its coverage area in 2025, which would be an all-time high. The service is managing to take on this workload despite a shortage in manpower.

"Our full-time roster would be 20 paramedics, so we're about three short there," Haas said. "We have 20 full time EMTs, so we're about 10 short. So roughly we're looking at about 520 to 580 hours a week that we're trying to fill in gaps for our ideal scheduled coverage."

The major financial bottleneck for Butler, and most other ambulance services in Pennsylvania, comes from low insurance reimbursements. Ambulance services make money by transporting patients to care centers. For an example of one patient that was transported to UPMC McCandless, Butler Ambulance Service billed the patient \$1,285, but Haas said it won't see all of that money.

"We can, at most, get \$761," Haas said. "Medicare reimbursed \$600, and we're working on tracking down \$150 from the patient." In addition, Butler Ambulance Service provides numerous free services for residents, such as lift assists, from which it derives zero revenue.

"If somebody falls and we come down and we help them up, that is a free service that we provide," Haas said. "If a diabetic's blood sugar is low, we come down, we start an IV, we give them some sugar ... that is a free service that we provide. We only get reimbursements whenever we take somebody to a hospital."

Butler Ambulance Service is an entirely professional service with no volunteers. Due to the cap in insurance reimbursements, the service is limited in the amount of compensation it can offer, according to Haas.

"As far as wages go, unfortunately, we're limited by what insurance reimburses us," Haas said. "It's a little frustrating and saddening to walk up to Sheetz and see the sign on the door that Sheetz pays more than we do for certain positions."

One method of financial assistance suggested by Haas would be a separate tax which would exclusively fund emergency medical services. Under state law, boroughs and townships are allowed to impose such a tax, at up to 0.5 mills, without requiring voter approval.

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However, Haas said this doesn't apply to every municipality in its coverage area.

"We're in a situation where every second-class township and borough can enact that tax automatically," Haas said. "Unfortunately, the city (of Butler) is a third-class City. The city of Butler does not have that mechanism."

Penn Township currently does not have a separate EMS tax, although it does charge a fire tax of 2.06 mills.

Butler Ambulance Service also covers a small portion of Forward Township, along with Harmony EMS and Quality EMS. The township compensates all three agencies by distributing it's annual revenue from the Local Service Tax as a grant.

Butler Ambulance Service is not the only EMS agency in Butler County making appeals to municipalities for financial help.

Chuck Lewis, the president of the Saxonburg Volunteer Fire Company's ambulance division, has made similar presentations to the boards of supervisors at both Winfield and Jefferson townships over the past few weeks and plans to do the same at the other three municipalities in its coverage area.