



Southern Berkshire Ambulance, Inc.
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January 7, 2022

Town of Monterey

435 Main Rd,

Monterey, MA 01245

To:

Monterey Town Administrator

Monterey Selectbord

Monterey Finance Committee

I am writing to update you on the extensive work done by Southern Berkshire Ambulance over the past year.

In September, I was appointed as the new Director of Operations, replacing William Hathaway. I bring a broad range of experience, having worked for County, Northern Berkshire, Hilltown, and Southern Berkshire EMS services.

This year we also welcomed four new board members with extensive experience in emergency services, municipal government, business, and finance. The Board of Directors conducted a needs assessment. There were several primary needs identified at the Squad. They are as follows;

1. Determine staffing requirements
2. Create a plan to retain and recruit staff
3. Upgrade aging ambulances and IT equipment
4. Pursue alternative funding sources,
5. Thoroughly reviewing our finances and maximizing revenues.

Our demand analysis shows that to meet response standards, two Paramedic ALS staffed trucks are needed 24/7, which is our current staffing model. The volume is high enough to require an additional staffed ambulance during high-demand times. In addition, we are working with Fairview Hospital to meet their needs transferring patients, both emergent and non-emergent. This will likely create enough additional transports to necessitate and fund a third-staffed

ambulance at least eight hours per day. That will benefit not just Fairview Hospital but also the communities we serve.

While we are very fortunate with outstanding EMS providers who are the backbone of Southern Berkshire Ambulance, retaining and recruiting more is necessary, particularly with a dangerous shortage of paramedics and EMTs both nationally and locally. Unfortunately, they have shown signs of burnout, which is becoming too familiar in our industry. The primary causes of poor morale are low wages, short staffing, and unreliable equipment.

A salary survey was conducted in the fall. We determined that our paramedic wages were meager. Starting January 1, 2022 a new, competitive wage scale is being implemented. SBA is running an EMT class beginning in January to increase the number of local EMTs. A few additional hires and promotions have also taken place to help address the staffing shortage. I conduct weekly shift commander meetings and monthly employee meetings to update employees on the Board of Directors' actions and receive feedback and concerns. Morale is improving.

The primary capital needs identified for Southern Berkshire Ambulance were replacing an aging fleet of ambulances and upgrading multiple IT components. Southern Berkshire owns four ambulances with an average age of 6.5 years and over 130,000 miles. In addition, each ambulance is frequently out of service for costly repairs, making it challenging for SBA to have a minimum of two ambulances in service. In May, The Southern Berkshire Emergency Medical Foundation provided lease-funding over three years to purchase one new ambulance. Its delivery date was to be November of 2021. But, due to COVID and supply chain issues, it has been pushed back to October of 2022, and there is no guarantee it will arrive then. As a result, SBA is in immediate need of replacing at least one more ambulance.

SBA was also in need of IT upgrades. Slow speeds and lack of reliability were highly frustrating for staff. The laptops in each ambulance used for writing mandatory Patient Care Reports were replaced, the server was upgraded, and FirstNet routers were installed in the ambulances to improve communications in the field. Additionally, multiple systems used for records management and scheduling have been combined under one vendor to increase efficiency and save on annual license and maintenance fees. The Southern Berkshire Emergency Medical Service Foundation has contributed over \$50,000 towards these projects.

Adelson & Company PC has been contracted to audit our 2020 books and retained going forward. We are awaiting their report and look forward to implementing any recommendations provided.

Mark Del Signore, a resident and former volunteer EMT for SBA with extensive experience in business and finance, agreed to review SBA's budget. Past years' expenses were analyzed to determine actual costs, trends, and potential savings. As a result, a new budget was compiled for 2022, which included a more detailed breakdown of line items to better track and control expenditures. His expertise and many hours of work are greatly appreciated.

The primary funding source for SBA is EMS billing. While the reimbursement rates from Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance are far below what is actually billed. We are working closely with our billing company, AMB, to ensure we do just that. As a result, we have increased our reimbursement rate from 85% to 90%. Although that is considered an excellent performance for the industry, we will strive to maintain this collection rate.

We have also pursued alternative funding sources. As mentioned previously, the foundation provided over \$250,000 in capital upgrades. We also applied for and received almost \$400,000 in COVID funding. It has offset additional expenses and subsidized our operating budget while improving operations. A federal AFG grant for \$55,000 is being submitted to fund the replacement of our radios.

As a result all of this work, our revenues projection for 2022 shows we should meet our budget of \$1.94 million. Therefore, we are happy to say we will not need a municipal subsidy for operations. However, the EMS industry has many changing components, and reimbursements for incidents are low, particularly for Medicare and Medicaid patients. Our goal is to remain self-sufficient, but if that does not appear to be possible, we will be proactive in informing you of any subsidies needed and why. In addition, we are working on revising our bylaws, including municipal representation on the board, to assist with transparency and communications.

Separate from 2022 Budgeting, SBA is requesting consideration of immediate use of funds from the American Rescue Plan Act. As mentioned earlier, the SBEM Foundation has committed to provide funding to replace one ambulance over three years. However, due to COVID-related supply chain disruptions, delivery of a new ambulance will not be possible until the 4th quarter of 2022 at best. Given the uncertainty of being able to maintain a reliable fleet, the need for a replacement ambulance is now immediate.

As mentioned before, the foundation has committed to lease payments towards purchasing one new ambulance scheduled to be delivered in October 2022. We still need to replace a second truck and are requesting \$250,000 of ARPA funds from the towns in our coverage area. Despite our projections of meeting our operating expenses for 2022, we do not have available funds to replace our ambulances. The state distributed ARPA funds based on populations, which is how we are requesting the contributions be made. The following table shows our calculations.

Town	ARPA	Percentage	Assessment
Alford	\$ 145,867	4%	\$ 9,496
Egremont	\$ 360,183	9%	\$ 23,447
Great Barrington	\$ 2,075,908	54%	\$ 135,138
Monterey	\$ 276,190	7%	\$ 17,979
Mount Washington	\$ 46,928	1%	\$ 3,055
Sheffield	\$ 935,279	24%	\$ 60,885
Total	\$ 3,840,355	100%	\$ 250,000

Your support would be greatly appreciated and will enable us to continue to provide quality EMS service to the Southern Berkshires. Our 2022 budget does include setting aside funds for future capital expenditures.

Our annual fund drive is currently ongoing. Meeting our budget is dependent on our fundraising efforts. Please encourage your community to support us to continue to provide the highest level of emergency medicine to your town.

Myself and the Board of Directors would be happy to attend a board meeting to provide further information on SBA and answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Caleb". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Caleb Stone NRP

Chief of Operations

Southern Berkshire Ambulance