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NEWS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact Information:

Laura Smith, Director of Public Affairs

VMSC Emergency Medical Services

175 Medical Campus Drive

Lansdale, PA 19446

lsmith@vmsclansdale.com

215.855.3779

www.vmsclansdale.com

LANSDALE, PA (August 11, 2023)—VMSC Emergency Medical Services, headquartered in Hatfield, PA, is taking a critical step forward to address evolving issues surrounding Pennsylvania's emergency medical services (EMS) crisis.

The closure of two Pennsylvania EMS agencies in the past month highlights the struggle realized across the Commonwealth and the Nation for ambulance providers and local communities. The issues surround critical staff shortages, under and uninsured patients, increased operating expenses, and low or no local government funding. Contrary to what many people think, most EMS agencies do not receive dedicated tax funding like fire and police. Municipal funding currently accounts for less than 1% of VMSC's budget. VMSC EMS is primarily funded by insurance reimbursement, which covers approximately 86% of expenses, leaving a 14% gap in the operating budget. VMSC bridges that gap in expenses with subscriptions, capital giving, and non-911 ancillary projects, which are unpredictable.

VMSC EMS has not been immune from the impact of this crisis; in 2021, VMSC could not staff all its stations, and staffing levels dropped to under 50%. These staffing shortfalls exacerbated an already overburdened and stressed EMS staff who were fatigued and recovering from two years of the COVID pandemic, but it also impacted VMSC's ability to respond to emergency calls and significantly increased the time people had to wait for an ambulance. VMSC's future was in question, and barely able to staff 1.8 ambulances on average. VMSC's Board of Directors and local municipal managers formulated a plan to avoid closure. At the insistence of the municipal managers, VMSC adjusted its by-laws and hired a career Chief, the first in the organization's history. VMSC reorganized and initialized VMSC's Emergency Reserve Funds to invest nearly a million dollars into employment compensation and benefits, expanded its clinical services by adding a new medical direction team, enhanced medical treatments, and upgraded its ambulance fleet.

The efforts over the past 2-years to improve the ninety-year-old North Penn ambulance provider paid off for the citizens of North Penn. In 2021, VMSC had a systemwide average response time that exceeded sixteen minutes and only operated 1.8 ambulances on average. Today, VMSC's average systemwide response time is less than eight minutes, and it operates seven ambulances on average to serve the 120,000 people who live and work in North Penn. VMSC's EMS ambulance staffing is consistently at 95%, and it has established staff retention sustainability programs that include an internal VMSC-funded Paramedic training program that will graduate ten paramedics in 2024.

When ambulance services close, the impact is drastic. In an ambulance response time study by Elizabeth Wilde of Columbia University, a one-minute response time increase resulted in an 8% - 17% increase in mortality in cases of stroke and cardiac arrests. The burden is also felt regionally as other ambulance services become strained and now must respond to the areas previously served by the collapsed system, thereby creating operational challenges and fiscal barriers to care for those ambulance providers and their communities.

People have expectations when they call for an ambulance; among those are that: they expect a quick response, competent, appropriate, and compassionate care, and to arrive safely at an emergency department. Funding is crucial to meet people's expectations. VMSC has invested heavily in training, clinical advancements, and operations to improve the lives of the people in the North Penn community. The municipal funding VMSC seeks is an investment in improving people's survival and quality of life when an emergency occurs.

Over the past year, VMSC and the North Penn municipal managers have explored ambulance funding. Over the next few months, VMSC will present a funding proposal for municipal boards to consider. Montgomery and Towamencin Townships' elected officials included EMS funding in their 2023 budgets. This funding made it possible to launch the VMSC 2023-24 Paramedic Education Program in partnership with Jefferson Health's EMS Program Education Center.

VMSC is requesting municipal funding to address the critical operational and fiscal sustainability areas, including staff retention, capital equipment replacement, and improving clinical performance to reduce morbidity and mortality in the Region. VMSC has posted its proposal and other information on its website as references in the link below.

<https://vmsclansdale.com/municipalsupport/>.

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