

**CALHOUN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING – EMS
JULY 24, 2018**

PRESENT AND ACTING:

**DANNY RAY WISE, CHAIRMAN
GENE BAILEY, VICE-CHAIRMAN
DARRELL MCDUGALD
JERAL HALL
DENNIS JONES**

**CARLA A. HAND, CLERK OF COURT AND COUNTY COMPTROLLER
KATHY STEWART, CLERK ACCOUNTING MANAGER
SARAH WILLIAMS, CLERK ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT**

Chairman Wise called the meeting held in the regular Board meeting room to order at 3:30 P.M., CT.

Mr. Keith Maddox provided the Board with packets containing their proposal for EMS services for 2018 and other financial data. Mr. Maddox showed the Board a brief video of a training exercise to give the Board an idea of the everyday occurrences encountered by EMS staff. Mr. Maddox stated this scenario should give the Board a clearer picture of just how difficult, and what the EMS staff is faced with, in rural emergency medicine. Mr. Maddox stated rural emergency medicine is challenging, and even though their call volumes are not astronomical, they are out of the County 33% of the time. Mr. Maddox stated Calhoun-Liberty Hospital offers great primary care and stabilization, but there are a lot of medical conditions that must bypass the local hospital for larger hospitals in the surrounding areas, which puts an ambulance out of the County for a long amount of time. Mr. Maddox stated the video shows four (4) crew members working together to stabilize the patient, and with standard staffing on weekends or evenings all it would take is for one (1) ambulance to be on a call and two (2) crew members would have had to do everything by themselves which is very difficult even for an experienced provider.

Mr. Maddox directed the Board to the EMS proposal in their packets. Mr. Maddox stated their objectives are to provide adequate EMS staffing to mitigate availability issues unique to the County, reduce negative patient outcomes related to protracted transport times to specialty care centers, reduce dependence on aeromedical use, recruit and retain EMS professionals, and update and modernize the medical equipment and infrastructure of EMS. Mr. Maddox stated EMS has the opportunity to improve availability of EMS care and transport 24 hours a day and integrate more advanced procedures, equipment, and training. Mr. Maddox stated EMS also has the opportunity to remain competitive with pay and improve benefits packages offered to employees that competes reasonably with that offered by government run operations and private, for profit, entities. MR. Maddox stated EMS has the opportunity to promote community growth by showing that a strong pre-hospital and medical component is in place for out area and by providing stable, competitive job opportunities. Mr. Maddox stated EMS has several recommendations for solutions to these objectives and opportunities. Mr. Maddox stated they would like to provide a quick response vehicle (QRV) staffed by EMS officers twenty-four (24) hours a day, seven (7) days a week. Mr. Maddox stated this is a first response vehicle in the form of a pick-up truck, which would carry specialized medical equipment and would be permitted by the Bureau of EMS. Mr. Maddox stated they would like to provide equipment and training for QRV officers integrating advanced medical equipment, medications, and skills such as

ultrasound, blood, and more advanced surgical procedures beyond current practice. Mr. Maddox stated he cannot afford to place specialized equipment and blood on every ambulance, but would be able to afford placing specially trained paramedics in critical care medicine with special skills and equipment on one QRV. Mr. Maddox stated providing the QRV, staffing and needed increased scope would allow for the QRV to be dropped and the QRV officer could accompany the EMS crew as a third member instead of sending an additional ambulance to assist the responding crew members. Mr. Maddox stated another opportunity this would allow would be to bring in another ambulance in the event all ambulances were out of the County. Mr. Maddox stated they recommend an increase in the subsidy base from the County to offset the cost of operations, facilitating improvement of benefit packages and incentives to help recruit needed staff and retain experienced healthcare providers. Mr. Maddox stated increasing the subsidy base would allow for funding to assist in rebuilding/modernizing the service's medical equipment and infrastructure and maintaining critical components over time. Mr. Maddox stated Calhoun-Liberty Hospital has taken proactive measures to improve EMS which includes, but not limited to, increasing salaries to become competitive in the region, repairing and updating EMS headquarters and training building, replacing infusion pumps and other antiquated equipment, and constructing a barn shelter to provide electrical shoreline power to EMS units, adding staff to cover a peak time day truck transport unit beyond what is mandated in the current service contract, and increasing and improving training to pre-hospital healthcare providers as to meet the increased requirements of a rural healthcare system. Mr. Maddox stated Calhoun-Liberty Hospital is requesting a base subsidy increase of \$40,000 for a total annual subsidy of \$280,000. Mr. Maddox stated the current subsidy that has been provided for the past six (6) years is \$240,000. Mr. Maddox stated the increase in the subsidy would assist in the continued proactive improvements to EMS, offset the increased cost of operation over time, help allow for future improvements in benefits packages for EMS workers, and to continue and expand community outreach and education. Mr. Maddox stated EMS currently has outreach efforts with the local volunteer fire departments, and pay an employee to train first responders in emergency medical situations. Mr. Maddox stated the Community Paramedic Program, especially if a QRV could be obtained, is a program where they would deploy a paramedic to a chronically ill patient's home in between doctor's visits to make sure medications are being taken appropriately and perform basic vital sign readings to make sure a patient is not declining. Mr. Maddox stated this practice could catch an issue early before a patient must be admitted to the hospital. There was further discussion about the Community Paramedic Program. Mr. Maddox stated to staff a QRV twenty four (24) hours a day seven (7) days a week would cost EMS about \$120,000 per year, as opposed to staffing a third EMS transport unit twenty four (24) hours a day seven (7) days a week which would cost about \$320,000 and is fiscally prohibitive. Mr. Maddox stated there are many situations where there is only one or no units left to respond to calls within the County. Mr. Maddox stated with a QRV the County would not be left without coverage if all ambulances were in use. Mr. Maddox stated there have been many times when both Calhoun County's ambulances and Liberty County's ambulance have been busy or out of the County, and there has been a call they have had to respond to in their personal vehicles. Mr. Maddox stated this is not illegal, but does open EMS up to liabilities. Mr. Maddox stated with a QRV there is less of a likelihood the County would be left without emergency medical care. Mr. Maddox stated a QRV would also reduce the reliance on air transport. Mr. Maddox stated air transport is very expensive for the patient, and is justifiable in some instances, but they are forced to use this method of transportation at times because of availability of EMS transport vehicles. Mr. Maddox stated they have provided for the Board county comparison data from surrounding counties regarding EMS services. Mr. Maddox stated the current subsidy rate has remained unchanged for many years despite increases in the cost of providing services and expanding the scope of practice of EMS providers. Mr. Maddox stated the comparison analysis of the surrounding agencies shows Calhoun-Liberty Hospital's fiscal commitment to provide adequate coverage availability of EMS units compared to funding. Mr. Maddox stated Liberty

County funds approximately \$231,000 annually for one (1) EMS unit compared to Calhoun County EMS which provides two (2) twenty four (24) hour units, one "week day" truck, and the staff that could cover a week day QRV currently for \$240,000 annually. There was further discussion about the EMS proposal. Mr. Maddox stated their execution strategy to their proposal would be to continue improving EMS infrastructure and equipment, continuing to work on recruitment and retention of staff, and improve EMS care and coverage availability.

Commissioner McDougald asked how many people are on staff at one time. Mr. Maddox stated there are four (4) crewmembers working two (2) twenty-four (24) hour trucks on nights and weekends. Mr. Maddox stated in the daytime on weekdays there are six (6) crewmembers, three (3) paramedics and three (3) EMTs (Emergency Medical Technician), and one (1) administrative personnel. Commissioner Jones asked how many employees total EMS employs. Mr. Maddox stated including as needed positions they employ about thirty-six (36) people. Commissioner Bailey asked how many full time employees are with EMS. Mr. Maddox stated if fully staffed, there would be fourteen full time positions not counting the possible QRV positions. Mr. Maddox stated they currently have two (2) open medic positions and one (1) open EMT position.

Mr. Maddox stated EMS must be able to remain competitive and update their systems, and want to make sure they are as fiscally sound as possible to provide the services needed. Mr. Maddox stated the current services cost they propose would be the traditional subsidy of \$240,000 plus the additional \$40,000, to bring the amount to a total of \$280,000. Mr. Maddox stated the operating expense subsidy for the twenty-four (24) hour QRV would be \$120,000 to have coverage at all times. Mr. Maddox stated their estimated cost for the operational QRV is around \$93,500. Mr. Maddox stated EMS looks forward to working with the Board of County Commissioners in supporting the common goal of providing the best possible healthcare to the visitors and citizens of the community. There was further discussion about EMS.

Commissioner McDougald asked if there is grant funding possible for a QRV. Mr. Maddox stated he is hesitant to apply for a grant for the QRV because there is a high possibility of needing a new ambulance at some point. Mr. Maddox stated if the grant funds are used for a QRV, it is less likely a grant for a new ambulance would be awarded to the County. Mr. Maddox stated two (2) of the ambulances in operation now are both high mileage. Mr. Maddox stated the ambulances are running fine, but they have over 200,000 miles. Mr. Maddox stated the third ambulance is lower mileage, but has been in the shop for repairs many times. There was further discussion about EMS. Commissioner McDougald inquired about collections for services rendered. Mr. Maddox stated they are very responsible with collections, and have made huge improvements in this area since he has been with Calhoun County EMS. Mr. Maddox stated they have changed billing companies and have gotten highly aggressive with making sure they have proper documentation and are billing correctly. There was further discussion about collections.

Commissioner Jones asked if there is a benefit to the mutual aid between Calhoun County and Liberty County EMS. Mr. Maddox stated the mutual aid agreement between the counties is beneficial, and can bill those patients that are transported any time Calhoun EMS aids Liberty County.

Chairman Wise asked out of the counties listed on the county comparison data sheet, how many are county operated. Mr. Maddox stated all but one County, Franklin County, are county run operations. Mr. Maddox stated Franklin County is subsidized similar to Calhoun County. Mr. Maddox stated the numbers reflected on the county comparison data is what the counties are having to contribute above collections.

Commissioner Jones stated he feels the QRT vehicle is a good idea, but funding is the only issue. Mr. Maddox stated they can afford to continue the services and improvements they have implemented now for an additional \$40,000, and if the QRV truck could be obtained they could operate this vehicle during peak hours for this same increase. Mr. Maddox stated in order to operate the QRV twenty-four (24) hours a day the additional \$120,000 would be needed, but he understands funding is difficult. Mr. Maddox stated this vehicle would be a benefit to the County, and is needed. There was further discussion about the QRV.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:47 p.m., CT.


DANNY RAY WISE, CHAIRMAN

ATTEST:


CARLA A. HAND, CLERK