



Extend Public Safety Officer Benefit to Include Ambulance and Air Medical Crews

Congress has established the “Public Safety Officer Benefit” program which provides assistance to the survivors of police, fire and ambulance staff employed by federal, state, and local entities in the event of their death in the line of duty. The program is administrated by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, Department of Justice. An exception was made by the Justice Department for September 11, 2001, when 8 non-governmental ambulance personnel were killed at the World Trade Center.

EMS personnel provide public benefit as public safety officers even if they are employed by hospitals, non-profit or independent ambulance services. The survivors of line of duty deaths should be treated with equality whether the public safety officer works for a governmental or non-governmental entity.

According to the National EMS Memorial Service, there have been 350 deaths among EMS responders and providers since 1993. While the totals differ significantly from year to year, the average is 24 ambulance line-of-duty deaths per year. Some of the line of duty deaths included in this average are employed by governmental EMS operators and are already included in the benefit. As of October 1st, 2005 the benefit provided through this program is \$283,385. The Association of Air Medical Services and the American Ambulance Association estimate that expanding the benefit to include non-governmental public safety officers, the average year’s claims would increase by 12 line-of-duty deaths, totaling a \$3,400,620 increase in the program.

Policy Statement: The National Rural Health Association joins with the Association of Air Medical Services, the International Association of Flight Paramedics, the National Association of EMTs, the American Ambulance Association and a host of state and regional EMS organizations to support extension the Public Safety Officer Benefit to include all of the police, fire and EMS personnel who lose their lives providing emergency medical duties as a public service.

This draft language would amend the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 to make non-public emergency EMS workers eligible for the Public Safety Officer’s Death Benefit Program:

“Any government or non-government employee or volunteer of a fire department, air or ground ambulance service, first responder or rescue squad, licensed or recognized by the State or local government, who is performing official duties serving the public in fire suppression, rescue, or emergency medical transport.”

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