

Smiths Station to Suspend Ambulance Transport Services

By **opelikaobserver** - February 9, 2022



CONTRIBUTED BY SSFR

Feb. 2022 Smiths Station Fire & Rescue "SSFR" will suspend ambulance transport operations indefinitely.

This reduction in services is the direct result of a severe staffing and funding shortage that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are extremely disappointed that it has become necessary to suspend our emergency transport capabilities, we started our ambulance service to fill a need and save lives and we have saved many lives," said Joe Walden, SSFR fire chief. " However, unfortunately without additional funding and staff we are unable to continue operations at this time. It is our sincere hope to restart as soon as possible."

"Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a nationwide shortage of Paramedic's and EMT's," said Daniel Sexton, SSFR deputy chief. " As with every industry the staffing problems have only gotten worse since the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, we have struggled to find enough personnel to staff our ambulance on a 24/7 basis for a number of months.

below average salaries along with the fact that private ambulance agencies neighboring counties are offering as much as \$10,000 signing bonuses has made it tough retain and/or attract new employees from the finite number of EMT's and Paramedics that are available in our area." He continued.

While the federal government has sent billions of dollars in COVID-19 relief funds to hospitals, cities, counties and states very little of this money has filtered down to Fire & EMS. SSFR Board Chairman Felton Atkinson said, "It's very frustrating to watch the news or read the newspaper and see how literally millions of dollars are being allocated by the government to all kinds of projects that are not directly covid related, while front line first responders — the ones answering 911 calls- are struggling to survive financially".

SSFR is working closely with EAMC ETS (the other ambulance service in Lee County) to minimize the impact this reduction in ambulance transport service will cause. ETS has been incredibly supportive and will do everything possible to help our community. SSFR will also continue to hold a ALS non-transport license in order to offer as much lifesaving services to citizens as possible.

Make no mistake this reduction in emergency ambulance transport service is a devastating blow to our community and all involved. We have witnessed first-hand how the quick response from our ambulance has not only improved the outcome of patients with a medical emergency, but we have seen lives saved by our ambulance. Everyone at SSFR wants to help people, we want to save lives and protect property, but we must have resources to do so.

Smiths Station Fire & Rescue hopes to develop and submit a plan to the Lee County Commission very soon that will help achieve the additional funding that is needed. We encourage concerned citizens to contact their elected officials and ask them to support our community and to help bring back ambulance transport service, expand our fire protection and rescue services.

ABOUT SSFR

Smiths Station Fire & Rescue was founded by concerned citizens in 1966. SSFR covers approximately 72 square miles, 35,000 citizens and answers over 2,000 emergency calls each year both inside and outside the city limits of Smiths Station. As the greater Smiths Station area continues to grow at a paid pace, we expect to continue to see rapid growth in calls for emergency assistance.

Citizens wishing to voice support for SSFR and emergency ambulance transport in the Smiths Station area can contact their elected officials.



