



As of Saturday, Smiths Station (AL) Fire & Rescue (SSFR) has indefinitely suspended its ambulance service, [the company says in a press release](#):

Effective February 5, 2022 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.

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Chief. “Another major issue for us has been funding. In addition to skyrocketing inflation affecting fuel, maintenance, and the medical supplies that are needed and required to operate an ambulance, we have been unable to offer basic employment benefits to our Paramedics and EMTs such insurance, retirement, and competitive salaries. This lack of basic benefits and 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 EMTs and Paramedics that are available in our area.”

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 ETS (the other ambulance service in Lee County) to minimize the impact this reduction in ambulance transport service will cause. SSFR will also continue to hold an 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.

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