

H561  
2/28/2022  
Attachment 2

Good afternoon Mr. Chair and committee members,

My name is Bill Arsenault and I serve as the fire chief and ambulance director for Kamiah Fire-Rescue.

As you work thru this, the second regular session of the 66<sup>th</sup> Idaho Legislative work, I would like to bring a few things to everyone's attention. And many of you are well-aware of some of them already.

Idaho is growing...fast, and without progressive thoughts in place for many of the rural areas of the Gem State. Right now, cities and counties across Idaho in some of the metro-areas are simply being reactive to the unprecedented growth no one was fully expecting, in part to the freedoms now wanted by so many from causation of the pandemic.

On January 20, 2022, I spent three hours being turned down for all the grants of Park and Recreation, Idaho Department of Transportation, and not meeting the specifics for Idaho EMS grants for the equipment we desperately need. Assistance to Firefighter Grants (funded under the DHS and FEMA) will also not fund what we need.

And spaghetti feeds, crab feeds, bake sales, and hopeful donations are a thing of the past thanks to COVID, and how people choose to spend their money as they move to Idaho or are now faced with different financial conditions then years past.

The area I serve as Fire Chief, Ambulance Director, and one of the only four Paramedics in two counties (Lewis and Idaho) for a population that we cover of almost 9,000 people. Kamiah sits in an area split by the Clearwater River, on the Nez Perce Indian Reservation. Our response area stretches from the Clearwater County Line on Highway 12 at mile marker 54 (Lewis County), with Paramedic response under mutual aid to the Montana state line (Idaho County). 120 mile stretch of Highway 12 as the only Paramedic ambulance service with a medium rescue unit. Thru to Highway 13 to Harpster. Up State Highway 162 to Winona, and up Highway 64 past the Nez Perce Grade to mile marker 24. Our daily traffic counter by ITD puts our area at almost 10,000 vehicles per day from Kamiah to Orofino (8,000 cars and almost 1,000 commercial vehicles).

Our first due area for ambulance services covers just shy of 6,000 with an additional 3,000 for Paramedic response (total 9,000); our first due fire area sits at 3,000; with more and more on the way. In some of the most beautiful areas of our state. Surrounded by state lands, US Forest Service land, and by tribal land. It is an over-layer of literally everything. Working with a mayor and city council, fire protection district commissioners, two sets of county commissioners, a tribal executive council, and four law

enforcement agencies on a regular basis (Lewis/Idaho County Sheriff's Departments, Tribal Police and FBI, and the Idaho State Police).

Our area is ranked as #2 out of 44 for food poverty.

In the year 2020, Kamiah Fire-Rescue did 420 calls for service. In 2021, we did 617. Of the responses in 2021, 49 were for motor vehicle crashes from Kooskia to the Clearwater County Line...along a narrow, two-lane road, literally next to the Clearwater River (if you drive in some places 12" off the west bound fog line, you will end up in the river, like seven of our crashes did). As this is logging country, 12 of our crashes in this area involved log trucks, semis' hauling freight, or a large vehicle of some sort. Our calls are involving people who are so desperate to leave where they came from, they are living in pickup campers, bumper pulls, 5<sup>th</sup> wheel campers, and RVs. Dropping stakes where-ever they can pull off the road, literally. Some of them are moving onto lands of IDL, USFS, and even private if they can find access.

We are borrowing snowmobiles and UTVs from local area residents to rescue people on medical calls who have chosen to now call Idaho home (two years in a row we have had to borrow from residents this type of equipment). We did another one just 10 days ago for a couple who are living in a 5<sup>th</sup> wheel in the back country roads of Idaho County

(<https://www.facebook.com/KLEWNews/videos/613140709758048/>).

We are responding almost weekly to crashes involving logging trucks and semis along Highway 12 (another one on January for a 53' flat deck fully loaded with board lumber rolled over).

When a semi or log truck are involved in an accident on Highway 12, just like many roads in Idaho, it becomes a backed-up mess along this highway. When we have people living in camping units on remote logging roads in the area, we have a difficult time accessing them in an ambulance more often than not.

The recent release of the Volunteer Providers of Emergency Medical Services (<https://legislature.idaho.gov/ope/reports/r2108>) paints an extremely bleak picture. And it is. Our area refuses taxation of any kind. So, in essence, we operate on a razor thin budget and that is not working. More calls for service, less funding from other areas, and higher costs for equipment and vehicles.

Yet, we are called every day to respond to calls with no hospital in the immediate area (closest hospital any direction is 30 miles away). Our calls in the Woodland, Glenwood, Caribel, Kooskia, Yaka's Creek, and Harris Ridge area will often take 30-45 minutes on a good day to get there and almost 1.5 to 2 hours to get to a hospital in Orofino, Cottonwood, or Grangeville.

As the person responsible for fire and medical response for this area, we are begging...pleading for help. I am doing everything I can to keep this system going. This area has not seen a new fire apparatus since 1991. Idaho EMS can grant fund us a new ambulance every five years (we currently have 3; two grant-funded from 2016 and 2010; one on a lease). But ambulances are useless in a lot of areas we cover in these rural mountain road / logging road areas at times. And our extrication equipment will not lift a semi off a person who has been ejected and is now stuck under the vehicle, or who has been hit head-on by a log truck. We must wait for a wrecking company to get the victim pulled apart from the semi.

Parks/Recreation will fund law enforcement for motorbikes, snowmobiles, utvs, and atvs for "enforcement of laws" on the public lands but won't fund those same items for fire and EMS agencies to respond to people living on the lands of Idaho. ITD will fund seat-belt campaigns and increased traffic enforcement campaigns with law enforcement covering costs of overtime and other equipment related expenses, but not the equipment to help Fire/EMS do rescues of injured or ill. EMS will not fund UTVs or ATVs. I know; I sat on the State EMSAC Grants Sub-Committees for 6 years and not once did we ever fund it. We funded ambulances, and QRU trucks/suburban's.

Yet, we have a state budget surplus of over a billion dollars. Again, we are begging and pleading for help in north central Idaho area of Kamiah and surrounding. We cannot continue to "hope" something works out.

Lewis County ambulance services include Kamiah and the community of Nez Perce. Neither of those agencies/communities have been awarded a new ambulance in the last six years. We as either one cannot afford the over carry for purchasing of a new ambulance when they are now costing over \$200,000 and the grant only allows for \$180,000.

The voters, the taxpayers, the citizens of Idaho and our Idaho guests deserve better.

I am respectfully asking, please re-evaluate how some of these grants are worded to open up funding for those "not the normal" items. I see some law enforcement agencies across our state literally with new response equipment almost yearly. In our area, by the time law enforcement shows up with equipment, that time has come and gone for quality patient outcomes. Those patients are your family, friends, neighbors, and guests.

Thank you for your time.

Respectively,

Bill Arsenault

P.S. We are in desperate need of two critical items: 1) low-pressure heavy lift rescue airbags for crashes involving large commercial vehicles (previously ITD did fund these many years ago, and local wrecking/tow companies in our area do not have them) and a UTV that can be converted from wheels (spring, summer, fall) to tracks during winter. In the last couple months alone, we have had to have a wrecker show up to help us secure a vehicle so that we could complete our rescue task. We cannot afford to purchase these large ticket items while still trying to keep our fleet operational.