

ity Firefighters Local 922

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To Whom it May Concern:

Your Baker City Firefighters need your assistance! Baker County Commissioners have decided to place your safety up for bid.

Current state, the Baker Ambulance Service Area (ASA) encompasses some 1600 square miles. The firefighters/medics of Baker City Fire Department provide a combined Fire and Medical response, like most fire departments in Eastern Oregon. We pride ourselves that we have always done more with less. Not only are your firefighters the paramedics on every ambulance in the Baker ASA, they are also all-hazard first responders, trained specially for multiple disasters and emergencies. We provide community education, prevention services, outreach, and host community courses.

Baker City Fire Department was established in the early 1900's with a first aid response vehicle.

In the 1970's, Baker City Fire Department became one of the state's first licensed ambulance service agencies. Historically, Baker City residents' property taxes have funded the purchase, maintenance, and, most importantly, the staffing of our paramedic level ambulance response service. Our goal has always been to provide outstanding quality, timely response to anyone needing assistance, in any type of emergency. In 2016, increased call volumes and our staffing levels hit a breaking point, and we knew we could only be in one place at a time. At that time, the Baker City Fire Department, on behalf of all Baker City and County residents, applied for and were awarded a federal grant. Baker City Fire requested aid from Baker County Commissioners. The Commissioners agreed this was prudent use of County funds and supported the effort with \$33,000 a year for the 3 year duration of the grant. Prior to this, residents of the county did not pay for the ambulance service they were receiving.

This grant and funding from the county increased staffing levels and put three additional cross-trained, dual-role fire fighter EMT's on duty to keep response times reasonable. It improved our ability to respond, treat, and transport more than one emergency at a time. Unfortunately, the Federal Grant program is coming to a close in January 2021. This will result in unfunded salaries, maintenance and supplies that would result in down-staffing, increased response time, and materials/maintenance shortages.

In each of Oregon's counties, the respective county commissioners are responsible for setting the conditions of ambulance service and who provides that service. Baker City Fire Department has provided that service for the majority of Baker County since the law was written in 1996, but have provided outstanding service for over 100 years to our community.

As with any change of political wind comes the need to look for decreasing costs, and the idea that private ambulance might be the fix to lower costs for service that Baker County needs. Currently, the County Commissioners have opted to put out a bid for the ASA, potentially privatizing ambulance response to the county.

We are writing to share our serious concerns with privatizing ambulance response to Baker County. Moving to this model would reduce staffing at Baker City Fire Department drastically - up to 6 of the current 16 positions would be lost immediately. This would reduce available firefighters to respond to

fire, freeway emergencies, Hazardous Materials incidents, and more. This has massive ramifications for public safety and the jobs and livelihoods of your current loyal and well-trained team of fire and medical responders. The strength of Baker City Fire Department lies in the cross-trained, highly dependable crew you trust currently with your care. Dividing in to separate fire and medical response may seem like a quick fix, but we disagree! What we might gain in profitability we lose in response capability.

Ambulance response is so much more than transportation to the hospital – we urge you to consider the other losses residents would feel by dividing the services. For profit private ambulance paramedics only do one thing - respond and transport to and from

the hospital. The rest is left up to an unfunded fire department decimated by the political will

of a County Commission whose entry into Ambulance system oversight is short sighted, economically risky and not informed good policy.

This bid for service minimizes the comprehensive approach that Baker City Fire Department takes to the care of our community. It assumes that all the County needs is a for profit ambulance company to transport you to the hospital. Your fire department responders are ready to act in the event of fire, accident, natural disaster or medical emergency.

For example, ambulance paramedics don't enter your home and rescue your family in the event of fire– but the fire department does!

Baker City Fire Department relies on ambulance revenue from transports to fund a portion of fire fighter paramedic salaries. In turn, you get rapid all-hazard trained fire fighter paramedics and reduced fire insurance premiums. While providing emergency response in a timely, responsible manner is seemingly expensive, we urge you consider our response model to all Baker County residents and visitors as a balanced and conservative approach that responds without fail to every call for service with compassion and the accountability you

deserve.

We as a community are at a crossroads, the three firefighters hired to expand service in 2017 are unfunded as of January 1, 2021. The timely, excellent service you've come to expect when you call 911 will come to an end. That staffing reduction means a potential for increased response times, not enough paramedics to respond to the community's needs in an emergency and the potential for increased fire insurance rates. Your fire fighters ask that you engage County leaders on what privatizing ambulance transport means to all Baker County residents and why our community would jeopardize so much in service, at such a huge risk?

Please follow our frequent ambulance and fire service updates on Facebook and Instagram.

On behalf of all the fire fighter paramedics and emergency medical technicians in Baker City and throughout all the communities in Baker County, both past and present, thank you for your support.

Baker City Professional Fire Firefighters Local 922

Jason Jacobs President