

October 22, 2006

Eric Glass
Chairman
Paramedic Association of Manitoba

Re: EMS for the City of Winnipeg

Dear Eric:

Thank you for your letter of October 17th and the Association's clear demonstration of concern for the Emergency Measures Services of Winnipeg.

I certainly support your efforts to improve our understanding of the difficult situation your members face in performing their duties, and to address the difficulties created by the merger plan. I want to acknowledge and compliment all paramedics who are putting in the extra hours and tremendous personal effort, at great cost to themselves and their families, to maintain such an important service to the public.

First, I want to point out that as your Mayor, I would put in place the means and measures to support City of Winnipeg employees who help improve public services. As I have released in my policy platform, city employees are a valued part of the civic system with a great deal to contribute to finding new ways of providing services that are efficient and effective. I do not believe, as it appears the current mayor believes, that civic employees are mere pawns in a bureaucratic game, or worse yet, a liability that must be shunted off to some other level of government or the private sector.

In direct response to your request for support, I think there are two levels of action that I would recommend and would pursue of elected mayor; provincial jurisdiction and municipal management.

It seems to make sense that paramedics services are "linked to an expanded role in primary health care and the Canadian Health Care system". As you point out, there are evolving demands on emergency services, and a closer practical relationship with our health care system could optimize the quality of services available to the public. There is a logical relationship between paramedics and emergency room staff for example, and there could be a great deal to gain from a streamlined relationship.

I agree therefore that negotiations with the Province should be expanded to find better ways of funding, managing and practically working with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. A model of service that deals with the practical provision of EMS and which also builds the capacity to training and support professional staff is obviously worth considering. Clearly the Province has a responsibility in redesigning the EMS system.

As for the current process for the amalgamation of paramedic and fire suppression services, I agree that the City has not handled this well and has not provided the leadership needed for a major change in providing EMS. I appreciate that you acknowledge that there is some “evidence to support utilization of medically trained fire fighters in an emergency first response capacity.”

As mayor, considering the current impasse in implementing the amalgamation of paramedic and fire services, I would reopen the plan and reconsider the best approach to providing EMS for Winnipeg. The prolonged confusion and inability to efficiently implement the amalgamation is demanding too much of you, your members and the firefighters, and could potentially be putting the public at risk.

What I would be asking you and other staff in the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service (WFPS) is what can and should we do to assure the appropriate EMS capacity while working within our fiscal capacity. How can we use the WFPS communication centre more effectively? Where can we best utilize and support first responders, fire medics and paramedics? What kind of central planning and coordination is most able to assure efficiencies and appropriate service? How can the health care system free up ambulances at the hospitals and deal with backlogged emergency rooms? Are there new technologies that we can adopt that will improve your capacity to respond to emergencies? What training is needed and possible for all staff in the system to take advantage of existing resources and personnel commitments?

Basically, I think we need to look at new ways of maintaining quality public services, but through the lens of staff experience and public input. No major change in providing public services can be done and forced on staff or the public. It is through collective analysis, planning and implementation that we can get the cooperation and commitment of those entire involved, needed to make the changes the citizens of Winnipeg deserve.

Thank you again for taking the initiative to publicize the situation your members are facing and offering suggestions for how to improve EMS for Winnipeg. I look forward to working with you and the paramedic staff in the future.

Yours truly

Marianne Cerilli
Mayoral Candidate