



Manitoba Paramedics... Responding for Life

October 20, 2006

Mr. Sam Katz
756 Pembina Hwy
Winnipeg, MB. R3M 2M7

Dear Mr. Katz:

I appreciate your very prompt reply to our correspondence regarding concerns related to Winnipeg's emergency medical services system.

Please rest assured that I am fully aware of the 2006 City budget allowances for the hiring of 12 new paramedics and an additional transport ambulance. While in principle it addresses the need to bolster EMS resources on the streets of Winnipeg, the fact remains that there are fewer paramedics working in ambulances today that there were before the 2006 budget was announced, the experience of Winnipeg's paramedics is steadily decreasing and Winnipeg still frequently finds itself in a position with no available ambulances to respond to emergency calls.

The statement you made regarding professional advice to utilize your "full fire paramedic service complement of professionals to respond to calls for medical emergencies in order to get trained professionals on-scene providing emergency service as soon as possible" is an area in which we share very common ground. At no time, Mayor Katz, has the Paramedic Association of Manitoba ever suggested differently. In fact, in my correspondence to you and the other Mayoral candidates, we acknowledged the evidence that supports using medically trained firefighters in an emergency first response capacity to ensure prompt medical treatment in the minutes before paramedics arrive.

What we are trying to point out to you and other members of City Council, however, is that your paramedics are medical professionals. Paramedics are healthcare providers, capable now of providing treatment for a multitude of life threatening conditions that only a few years ago had to be delivered by physicians in a hospital setting. With all due respect, the education and clinical expertise that is now required by an advanced care paramedic significantly outweighs the "training" that was necessary for EMS practitioners at the time the amalgamation decision was first considered.

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There is also tremendous potential for paramedics to be utilized in many non-traditional EMS roles that require these professionals to be more fully integrated into our health care system. As mentioned in our previous correspondence, the Emergency Medical Services Chiefs of Canada believe the value of paramedics in the future is directly linked to an expanded role in primary health care and the Canadian health care system. Paramedics today are utilized in other major centers to help alleviate the backlog of ambulances sitting at hospital emergency departments and get these units back on the streets where they are needed. Other centers have incorporated protocols that allow paramedics to make better decisions about the need for their patients to be seen in our already congested emergency departments. The amalgamated model that Winnipeg has chosen to pursue... a model using cross-trained firefighters and paramedics that has not been successful in any other major Canadian jurisdiction... will not allow that type of integration to occur. Integration that could, in fact, help alleviate the strain currently placed on ambulance availability in Winnipeg.

I appreciate the “best professional advice” that you and your councilors have received in the past. Here’s the best professional advice we can give you. The City of Winnipeg must reconsider the current amalgamation model, and work closely with the provincial Government, Manitoba Health and the Regional Health Authorities to find a more appropriate model for the delivery of emergency medical services. A model that recognizes paramedics as health care professionals. A model that more efficiently and effectively utilizes all of Manitoba’s EMS resources. If you don’t, the problems you are currently experiencing... ambulance and paramedic shortages, the inability to attract experienced paramedics to the City of Winnipeg and ineffective utilization of paramedics within the health care system... will continue to mount.

If re-elected on October 25th I certainly hope you will take this advice into consideration.

Respectfully yours,

Eric Glass
Chairman
Paramedic Association of Manitoba