

Dear Chair Backer and Members of the Health Finance and Policy Committee:

We write in full support of HF 337 for the establishment of an Ambulance Operating Deficit Grant Program.

CentraCare is the largest rural health care provider in MN, serving more than 700,000 people in Central, West Central, and Southwest MN. Besides the St. Cloud hospital, we have 8 rural hospitals serving, Monticello, Benson, Long Prairie, Sauk Centre, Melrose, Willmar, Paynesville, and Redwood Falls. Unfortunately, as you know, there is a severe crisis facing emergency medical response in rural Minnesota, where ambulance services respond to nearly 715,000 calls for service each year.

Unfortunately, emergency medical services in Minnesota continue to face critical challenges to deliver services across the state. Severe reimbursement shortfalls, aging workforces, unsustainable staffing models, and increased operating costs are forcing communities to make tough decisions. This crisis will have life-threatening consequences for families and their communities. These problems are exponentially greater for those serving rural areas as we continue to see increases in the percentage of Medicare/Medicaid patients. Under the current reimbursement system, many rural primary service areas are simply unable to break even. Therefore, we strongly support a long-term sustainable operating deficit grant program. CentraCare is committed to making rural life healthier and we fully recognize the crisis to rural EMS must be solved so that we, and others, can continue to provide these lifesaving services as efficiently and effectively as possible to rural communities throughout Greater MN.

We would like to thank Representative Zeleznikar for authoring this bill and encourage the support of the full committee.

Respectfully,



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