

February 8, 2021

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The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) represents over 60,000 front-line healthcare workers in Ontario. Among those we represent are the County of Lambton paramedics who service your County and their constituents.

Recently, there has been much debate about first response coverage within the City of Sarnia. We believe that decisions made without the input of front-line paramedics has the potential to detrimentally affect not only Sarnia but your constituents as well.

You have been provided with various statistical reports (see agenda report November 18, 2020). As noted in the report, County of Lambton paramedics responded to 29,444 calls in 2019. 17,325 of those calls were direct 911 calls and 12,119 of those calls were for standby (moved from their home Base to provide area coverage while the assigned ambulances in the Sarnia area were attending to other emergency calls.) This means that the areas that you represent did not have ready emergency coverage because they were attending to shortages providing coverage. 10,395 of the 911 calls mentioned above (out of the 17,325) were within the Sarnia boundary.

The majority of calls in Sarnia take place between 0630 and 1900 hours and represent roughly twelve to sixteen calls per day, with outlying crews having to pick up the slack. Notwithstanding the tremendous impact this places on a paramedic, including no ability to take breaks, risk of incomplete paperwork reporting, and increased sick time, particularly in a Covid environment, it poses a real risk to outlying communities with Lambton County.

We are sure that you all will recall the unfortunate incident several years ago in Watford and the tent electrocution. Several individuals were seriously injured and one died. Because ambulances who normally service this community were supporting Sarnia, it took an extraordinarily longer time for paramedics to respond. Fortunately, Ornge was flying overhead and a LEMS QA manager was able to assist. This won't always be the case.

As you know statistics can be deceiving and they can be presented in a variety of ways. Continuing to hear that the County of Lambton has ten ambulances to support the County just does not help if yours is the area that has no coverage. When we compare other services like Cornwall SDG, with a population of 111,000 to Lambton County, with a population of 126,638, we see just how Lambton is lagging behind. Cornwall SDG-EMS deploys fourteen ambulances and five paramedic response units. Lambton County has ten in total. Cornwall has six administrative staff to run their operation, Lambton has eight and additional support staff.

The fact is with the generally high and steady daytime call volume of the Sarnia area it's causing County crews to be syphoned into its boundaries for coverage. This frequently causes large coverage holes within the County creating drastically increased response times.

We have been attempting to get real data – real numbers that reflect what our paramedics see every day – not statistics to fit a narrative, but we have been met with resistance. We have had to resort to freedom of information requests and continue to be jockeyed from one body to another.

Please ask the following questions and seek clarification from those on the front line and add an ambulance to better protect Sarnia, the paramedics, and as a result your constituents and communities:

- what is the daytime average 0630-1930 call volumes vs 1930-0630 nighttime volumes from the county and the city?
- how often are county ambulances attending to 911 calls within the Sarnia boundaries?
- with the exception of the Brights Grove base how often are County vehicles being used as coverage for the Sarnia area?
- Ask just how unit utilization hours are being determined with a detailed explanation of what constitutes an ambulance being used vs not used?
- how often is LEMS reaching level 3 of their strategic deployment plan where code 3 calls are being held and out of county Paramedic services are potentially being utilized within our borders.
- How often are crews at hospitals without disinfected stretchers and equipment being utilized as coverage?

It was reported at the County Council meeting on Nov 18, 2020 that outlying stations are often brought into the Sarnia area to allow for meal breaks and down time for busy crews during busy shifts. This is not an accurate statement. Crews often have delayed/

missed meals, eat in the ambulance on the way to calls and have to hold their bladders due to calls. If the crews get any perceived down time, it's often utilized for catching up on paperwork which (average ePCR paperwork takes 20-45 min per call and potentially greater than 1 hour for complex calls) is quite often lagging behind and is frequently prioritized over eating a meal just to try and stay caught up..

Staff do not feel supported by their Chief with morale quite low. We view the statistics you have been provided are skewed. The only part of the Service that seems to be supported is the growing Community Paramedic stream. While we support a CP program, it should never be in place of emergency services available for you or your family members/constituents.

There has been no increase in ambulances in Lambton County since 2000 and some staffing hours increased in 2004 - twenty years since ambulances have been added to Lambton County. Daytime call volumes increase while coverage decreases.

The Paramedics of Lambton EMS want nothing more than to serve the citizens of Lambton County in the best way that it can. The paramedics want to provide exceptional service, one that they can continue to be proud of. At the present time, they don't feel supported and they don't feel valued. Most of all, they worry that coverage won't be there when one of their - or your family member requires it.

The paramedics of Lambton County are asking for your support to add an additional 12 hours of ambulance coverage to reduce the ongoing and increasing strain to the City of Sarnia and Lambton County.

Thank you for your consideration regarding this matter. Should you have any additional questions or require any clarification, we would be happy to assist. You can contact me directly via email at l.chapman@seiuhealthcare.ca or via cell phone at (705) 794-2854.

The paramedics of Lambton County
SEIU Local 1 Canada