

**PINELLAS COUNTY  
EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES  
ADVISORY COUNCIL**

**MEETING MINUTES  
June 23, 2023**

The Pinellas County Emergency Medical Services Advisory Council met in person at the John Morroni EMS & Fire Administration Building, 12490 Ulmerton Road, Conference Room 130/132, Largo, Florida, at 10:00 A.M. on this date with the following members present:

Jorge Mercado, Citizen Representative (District 7) – Chair  
Mayor Sandra Bradbury, Mayors' Council (Pinellas Park) – Vice-Chair  
Gayle Guidash, Pinellas County Health Department - Secretary  
Tina Ambrose, Citizen Representative (District 4)  
Ty Dougherty, Citizen Representative (District 6)  
Chief Anthony Tedesco, City of Clearwater Fire Chief (Alternate)  
Mayor Woody Brown, Mayors' Council (Largo)  
Mayor Sandra Bradbury, Mayors' Council (Pinellas Park)  
Nancy Hopkins, Emergency Nurses' Association West Coast Florida Chapter  
Chief Terry Tokarz, EMS Coordinator  
Commissioner Kevin Kenney, Independent Fire District Elected Official  
Siomara Bridges-Mata, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Pinellas  
Dr. Zachary Zimko, PEMHS, Mental Health Professional  
Chief Chad Pittman, Pinellas County Fire Chiefs' Association  
Dr. Anthony Ottaviani, Pinellas County Osteopathic Medical Society  
Capt. Michael Leiner, Pinellas County Sheriff's Office  
Dr. Eric Carver, St. Petersburg College  
Chief Ian Womack, St. Petersburg Fire & Rescue  
Jeremy Tinter, Sunstar Paramedics (Alternate)

**Absent:**

Jeri Reed, Citizen Representative (District 3)  
Becca Tieder, Citizen Representative (District 5)  
Mayor Dave Gattis, Mayors' Council (Belleair Beach)  
Mayor Dan Saracki, Mayors' Council (Oldsmar)

**Staff Present:**

Cody Ward, County Attorney's Office  
Dr. Angus Jameson, Medical Director  
James Fogarty, Bureau Director, Safety & Emergency Services  
Jeremy Capes, Safety & Emergency Services  
Craig Hare, Director, EMS & Fire Administration  
Ken Grimes, EMS & Fire Administration  
Mark Eggers, EMS & Fire Administration  
Chris Jordan, EMS & Fire Administration  
Leyna Lacognata, EMS & Fire Administration  
Lynn Abbott, EMS & Fire Administration  
Jennifer Peters, EMS & Fire Administration

**Also Present:**

Commissioner Casey Cane, Independent Fire District Elected Official (Alternate)  
Capt. Thomas Kras, St. Petersburg Fire & Rescue (Alternate)  
Chief Douglas Zimmerman, EMS Coordinator (Alternate)  
Chaplain Danny Champagne, Clearwater Fire & Rescue  
Michael Crispino, HCA  
Chief Brett Schlatterer, Pinellas Park Fire Department  
Chief Jeffrey Davidson, Pinellas Suncoast Fire & Rescue  
Jazmin Soloman, Sunstar Paramedics

**CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

Chairman Jorge Mercado called the meeting to order at 10:00 A.M. Roll call was taken, and Lynn Abbott confirmed that a quorum was met. There were 18 voting members in attendance.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**INVOCATION**

Invocation by Chaplain Danny Champagne, Clearwater Fire & Rescue.

**MINUTES OF THE MARCH 17, 2023 MEETING - APPROVED**

Upon presentation by Chairman Mercado, a motion was made by Mayor Woody Brown, seconded by Mayor Sandra Bradbury and unanimously approved, that the minutes of the March 17, 2023 EMS Advisory Council meeting be approved.

**CITIZENS TO BE HEARD**

There were no citizens to be heard.

Ken Grimes presented Lynn Abbott with a certificate recognizing her 10 years of dedicated service with Pinellas County.

**SELECTION COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS**

Chairman Mercado related that the Selection Committee met earlier today and reviewed the applicants to fill the citizen vacancies for Commission Districts 1 and 2. The Selection Committee rank-ordered and recommended the following candidates for presentation to the Board of County Commissioners: For District 1 - No. 1, Christopher Markham, and No. 2, Michael DiBuono; and for District 2 - No. 1, Doreen Caudell, and No. 2, Heather Vernillo.

Following discussion, Mayor Woody Brown moved, seconded by Commissioner Kevin Kenney, that Christopher Markham as primary representative and Michael DiBuono as secondary be recommended to serve District 1. Upon call for the vote, the motion was unanimously approved.

Following further discussion, Ty Dougherty moved, seconded by Gayle Guidash, that Doreen Caudell as primary representative and Heather Vernillo as secondary be recommended to serve District 2. Upon call for the vote, the motion was unanimously approved.

**WATER RESCUE UPDATE**

Ken Grimes provided background information regarding the Water Rescue Grant Program, marine operations, and resources needed to support and improve capabilities across Pinellas

County; whereupon, he referred to a PowerPoint presentation titled *Pinellas County EMS & Fire Administration Marine Report* and discussed the following:

- Overview, Risk Involved in the Marine Environment.
- Resources Type.
- Resources Locations.
- Incident Location.
- Fish and Wildlife Data.
- Marine Response by Month.
- Day of Week.
- Time of Day.
- Memorial Day Weekend.
- Predictability of Marine Incidents.
- Marine Rescue Operational Committee.
- Joint Training with USCG.
- Grant Funds.
- Hexagon and ImageTrend.
- Future Goals.
- Summary.

Throughout the presentation, Mr. Grimes responded to queries by the members and, with input by Jim Fogarty and Craig Hare, discussed rescue operations, average marine response times, strategic distribution of resources, and program sustainment.

#### **ALS FIRST RESPONDER ENHANCEMENTS**

Craig Hare, referring to a PowerPoint titled *EMS Advisory Council Briefing on EMS System Enhancements FY23-24*, discussed the following projects and initiatives and presented information regarding the FY23-24 EMS System ALS First Responder Enhancement recommendations:

- Hexagon - The CAD project is currently underway throughout the entire county, with an anticipated implementation date of mid-2024. The project's progress has been promising thus far. A demonstration is scheduled for this autumn, organized by the P.R.I.M.E Team (Pinellas Regional Information Management Enterprise), which aims to unite and support all stakeholders involved in the system. The ultimate goal is to achieve full integration, enabling seamless collaboration among the Police, Fire, and EMS agencies, thereby significantly enhancing situational awareness for all parties involved.
- ImageTrend - The process of configuring Hexagon is currently underway, which will serve as our centralized platform for EMS/Fire reports, fire inspections, pre-plans, and as a health information hub with a seamless data connection to hospitals. Dedicated configuration committees are diligently working throughout June and July to facilitate the involvement of power users to gain proficiency with the system. This will allow the start of offline testing and provide valuable feedback regarding necessary enhancements.

The testing and feedback phase is scheduled to occur from July to September, followed by a comprehensive systemwide review in September. This review ensures its readiness for training purposes in October. If all progresses as planned, the system is scheduled to

go live in November. Mr. Hare provided examples that offered a glimpse into the enhanced functionalities of the new system, including the redesigned EMS/Fire reports and other exciting features. These examples demonstrated the improved user experience and showcased the anticipated benefits of the upcoming system.

- LifePak 15 - Unfortunately, there was a setback in the initial collaboration with Philips, as they were unable to fulfill the order and ship the units within the upcoming year. Consequently, the Board of County Commissioners made the decision to approve a new agreement with Physio for the acquisition of LifePak 15 units. The month of July will be dedicated to "Train the Trainer" sessions, focusing on empowering designated power users within the organization. Subsequently, in August and September, comprehensive training programs will be conducted for all EMTs and Paramedics. The go-live phase will be initiated on a per-agency basis, allowing each chief to activate the system once they feel ready. By October, we anticipate complete deployment and operational readiness across all agencies.

This project, valued at approximately \$10 million, encompasses the procurement of 160-plus monitors for Fire Rescue, along with approximately 80 monitors for Sunstar. Notably, the company has graciously accepted trade-ins for all the old equipment, further facilitating the transition process. A short question and answer session ensued.

- Budget - The allocation of resources, particularly in relation to the First Responder and Ambulance budgets, holds great significance in our annual considerations. Our funding model operates on a per-transport basis, ensuring a straightforward approach to regular operational expenses. The primary focus of our discussion with stakeholders is the First Responder budgets. We prioritize addressing funding adjustments to maintain the current level of service.

Among the 18 departments, 16 are projected to exceed the 3% cap due to our commitment to keeping pace with inflation and escalating costs. Covering the currently funded positions takes precedence over considering additional resources to avoid any gaps in coverage. The budget is projected to increase from \$64.8 to \$70.7 million, reflecting an overall growth of 9.1%. Additionally, taxable values have experienced favorable growth, reaching a 12% increase. To ensure long-term financial sustainability without burdening taxpayers through frequent tax rate adjustments, we engage in a six-year financial forecast. This proactive approach allows us to evaluate the feasibility of our financial plans and anticipate future costs such as salaries, benefits, and significant expenses like the rising prices of rescue trucks, which now average around \$300,000. The EMS Authority may do a partial rollback to give taxpayer relief.

- Fire Rescue Transport Update – Diligently working to resolve continued staffing issues experienced across the system. On May 11, the Medical Control Board transitioned to post-pandemic operations. As a result, COVID-19 response plans were turned off, and normal clinical procedures as per the Medical Operations Manual were resumed. However, to maintain staffing standards, the Emergency Medical Responder (EMR) and BLS 9-1-1 response components were retained.

The system coordinators met with the Medical Director, chiefs, and Sunstar to devise improvements that included the introduction of a new medical control directive that utilizes BLS ambulances for transportation and matches patients to ambulances according to their need. The goal is to reduce the use of fire department units in pre-pandemic levels during ambulance transport. In North and South County, new Rescue units have been added to enhance geographical coverage.

The system coordinators are considering recommendations to improve the system's paramedic training, coaching, and support. However, they have held back on requests for supervisory positions due to paramedic staffing shortages. A workforce roundtable is planned for July or August.

### Fiscal Year 23-24 EMS System Enhancements

- Traffic Preemption – Work has been progressing on the implementation of traffic preemption technology to enhance emergency response times. With a capital of \$2.5 million, all First Responder units and ambulances will be equipped with traffic preemption boxes, allowing them to hold green lights or change red lights before arriving at an intersection while responding with lights and sirens, to not only ensure the safety of emergency crews but also reduce stress for the motoring public. It is estimated to save 10 to 15 seconds per intersection and up to a minute in regular response time, with the possibility of improving service levels across the system.

The pilot project along the East Lake Road corridor recorded an increase in emergency response time compliance from 85% to 91% in only a year, affirming the effectiveness of the technology. The Highway Department will work with traffic systems in Clearwater and St. Petersburg to bring the technology to 250 to 300 intersections, ultimately improving emergency response times and saving lives. Video link to be sent to members.

- Water Rescue Grant Resolution Update - An improvement in the system suggests the need to update the Water Rescue Grant Resolution, which is funded by EMS funds according to a County resolution. The proposed update to the Water Rescue EMS Grant Resolution 17-47 would allow for the use of budgeted funds to reimburse for personnel to staff marine units during peak periods like summer holiday weekends and is a no-cost recommendation. If the Authority approves the resolution update, the change may happen within a month, and the first trial is expected to be on Labor Day weekend.
- Largo Medic 42 Peak/Civilian Unit; Mid-Year.
- Pinellas Park Squad 36; Full Year. Fire Station 36 and Squad 36 as Contractor Funded x 3 Years.
- Safety Harbor Medic 53 Peak Unit +1 and 40-Hour Pilot Project.
- St. Petersburg +6 Staffing Positions.
- Tarpon Springs Rescue 69 +1 24/7 Position; Mid-Year.

Upon request to speak by Chief Jeffrey Davidson to Chair Mercado, Chief Davidson handed out a document related to Rescue 27, stepped up to the podium, and discussed his concerns regarding an area within his district that he perceived as inadequate response times, lack of resources, and additional funding, questioning the accuracy of the data used at Data Driven Focus Group (DDFG) meetings supporting requested system additions for his agency. He related that a new fire station between existing Stations 27 and 44 has been put forward. Lengthy discussion ensued and various inquiries were raised and addressed concerning the data.

Craig Hare noted that the DDFG convenes monthly to deliberate on budgetary planning and determine the feasibility and priority levels of various items, noting other upgrades that are scheduled or have already taken place at specific agencies. Mr. Hare, with input by Jim Fogarty, presented the County's position and referenced a slide regarding Rescue 27, reviewed a Quality Assurance Review case requested by Chairman Mercado, and provided two slides with the incident analysis. Mr. Hare noted that he will meet with Chief Davidson to discuss his concerns and look further into the data.

Following discussion and upon presentation by Craig Hare, a motion was made by Gayle Guidash, seconded by Mayor Woody Brown, to approve the FY23-24 EMS System Enhancement recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC). Upon call for the vote, the motion passed unanimously.

### **EMS DIRECTOR REPORT**

Craig Hare presented an EMS operations report and briefed the members on the following topics (combined with last agenda item):

Jim Fogarty provided an overview of the Live 9-1-1 project, noting that the item was presented to the BCC yesterday. He discussed the successes and difficulties that the pilot has had so far, adding that more testing needs to be done to determine if this will be something that EMS & Fire will actually use.

Craig Hare introduced Commissioner Kevin Kenny as the new primary seat representing the Independent Fire Districts and Commissioner Casey Cane as the alternate. Commissioner Cane is the Palm Harbor Fire Commissioner. Dr. Zachary Zimko has joined the EMS Advisory Council representing mental health facilities and is the Medical Director of PEMHS.

Mr. Hare welcomed Jeremy Capes as the new IT Manager for Safety and Emergency Services, overseeing all things technology-wise for Safety and Emergency Services under Dave Hare; Bob Crandall as the new Applications Analyst, overseeing the ImageTrend System; Leyna Lacognata as the new EMS Data Systems Coordinator; and Jennyfer Peters as the new EMS Administrative Assistant. One last position to be filled is the Clinical Manager.

### **MEDICAL DIRECTOR REPORT**

Dr. Angus Jameson presented the Medical Director's Report and briefed the members on the following topics:

- Personnel
  - Dr. Andrew Kropp has finished his training year and graduates from his EMS Fellowship tomorrow.

- Dr. Kenneth Dumas has been selected as the new EMS Fellow. He is currently one of the chief residents in the ER at Tampa General.
- Dr. Donna Dooley has stepped back from her role as Associate Medical Director and will continue on with Online Medical Control. We appreciate her dedication and value the ongoing contributions she will make in this revised capacity. Dr. Dooley was recognized at yesterday's Medical Control Board meeting and presented with an award celebrating her decade of service to the system.
- Protocols
  - Following the successful rollout of our new protocols in January, we have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from hospitals, acknowledging the significant impact of these protocols. The Medical Control Board has approved the updates to our cardiac arrest and cardiac dysrhythmia protocols, along with the establishment of a dedicated Critical Care Team.
- Clinical Operations
  - Dr. Jameson recently attended the quarterly State EMS meeting and the Gathering of the Eagles, which is a group comprised of medical directors from some of the largest EMS systems in the country, where he learned our recent ROSC (Return of Spontaneous Circulation) rates have been outstanding. Overall, we achieved a 32.8% rate for patients in cardiac arrest, with a remarkable 39.1% for those in shockable rhythms. These numbers exceed the averages of agencies in Florida (29%) and nationwide (26.7%). Considering the age demographic and prevalence of chronic medical conditions in our community, our performance speaks volumes about our capabilities.
  - Continuing to actively look at the utilization of Freestanding Emergency Departments (FSEDs). These facilities possess comparable capabilities to hospital-based emergency rooms, offering a wide range of services and often experience high levels of activity. Therefore, our focus is on optimizing resource utilization within communities to ensure the most effective and efficient delivery of care. By leveraging these facilities, we can enhance overall healthcare efficiency while maintaining the same level of quality and expertise.
- Substance Use Disorder Programs
  - We have a strong focus on addressing substance abuse disorders, specifically Opioid Use Disorder. As part of our efforts, we have established partnership programs that aim to break the cycle of this chronic, relapsing disease. One such program is our *Leave Behind Narcan* initiative. Our ambulances, fire trucks, and fire stations are equipped with opioid overdose rescue kits, including instructions, community resources, and multiple doses of Narcan. This program enables members of the public to effectively reverse an overdose and save lives.
  - Under the federal grant program called COSSAP (Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program), our paramedics and EMTs can refer patients from the ambulance to long-term care for Opioid Use Disorder. Over the past year and a half, we have successfully facilitated numerous individuals' entry

into long-term treatment. This achievement is made possible by the paramedics engaging in meaningful discussions with patients in the back of the ambulance, educating them about the disease, and ultimately making valuable referrals for their continued care.

- Through a partnership program, Pinellas Matters, we collaborate with County employees and Human Services to provide comprehensive care for individuals with substance abuse disorders. Professionals from Dr. Jameson's office assist patients to get successful treatment pathways in emergency rooms, ensuring not only acute expertise but also long-term care, wraparound services, and necessary support systems.
- Closely monitoring advancements in trauma care, specifically in the areas of transfusion of whole blood products and the use of TXA (Tranexamic Acid) medication. These developments hold significant importance for individuals experiencing hemorrhage from trauma, injuries, stabbings, or shootings. We maintain strong partnerships with our colleagues at trauma centers to ensure that we are collectively aligned and up to date with the latest advances in these critical aspects of care.

### **FIRE CHIEFS' REPORT**

Chief Chad Pittman related that the most recent meeting of the Pinellas County Fire Chiefs' Association included discussion about BLS transport units, noting that the topic was covered earlier, and the system will continue to be monitored. Chief Pittman expressed appreciation that Craig Hare attended the Fire Chiefs' meeting and answered questions.

### **SUNSTAR REPORT**

Jeremy Tinter provided statistical information regarding call and transport volumes, recruiting efforts, and staffing challenges. Sunstar now offers a \$30,000 relocation bonus for out-of-state paramedics in order to attract more candidates. Currently there are 4 paramedics in their pipeline, 27 EMTs in training, and 18 paramedics and 9 EMRs currently graduating from the program. Using the Earn to Learn Program in July, they are shooting for 24 EMRs to be put through the program. 26 paramedics are currently in a scholarship for any program of their choice. Mr. Tinter gave kudos to Jazmin Soloman for assisting with Narcan and CPR training for 340 Pinellas County school administrative staff.

### **AFFILIATES & STAKEHOLDERS**

No discussion had from affiliates and stakeholders.

### **OPEN FORUM**

Jim Fogarty highlighted that our financial services group has achieved remarkable success in ambulance collections. Currently, they are projected to collect over \$13 million more than the budgeted amount. This accomplishment is particularly noteworthy considering the challenging environment in the industry and the need for careful coordination with County employees. The financial services team, led by Jodie Sechler, deserves recognition for her team's exceptional effort in securing these additional funds. This financial achievement is significant as it supports non-tax-supported initiatives and services.



Mr. Fogarty also acknowledged Regional 9-1-1's impressive 10-second answer times, highlighting that despite handling over 2000 calls daily, on some days 9-1-1 approaches 100% 10-second answer times and is consistently in the high 90s. He noted that this exceptional level of responsiveness is a testament to the efficiency and dedication of the Regional 9-1-1 Center in promptly addressing emergency calls.

Siomara Bridges-Mata introduced herself as the newly appointed Executive Director for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and sits as an EMS Advisory Council member representative for NAMI-Pinellas.

#### **NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING**

The next meeting is scheduled for September 29, 2023, format to be in person.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

Upon motion duly made by Commissioner Kevin Kenney, seconded by Dr. Eric Carver and carried unanimously, Chairman Mercado adjourned the meeting at 12:13 P.M.

*Audio and any correspondence received for this meeting is on file at the Pinellas County EMS & Fire Administration.*