

**PINELLAS COUNTY
EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES
ADVISORY COUNCIL**

**MEETING MINUTES
September 19, 2025**

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:

Commissioner Kevin Kenney, Independent Fire District Elected Official – Chair
Christina Snoots, Citizen Representative (District 3)
Ty Dougherty, Citizen Representative (District 6)
Commissioner Jorge Mercado, Citizen Representative (District 7)
Chief Tony Tedesco, City of Clearwater Fire Chief (Alternate)
Nancy Hopkins, Emergency Nurses' Association West Coast Florida Chapter
Mayor Dave Gattis Mayors' Council (Belleaire Beach)
Mayor Woody Brown, Mayors' Council (Largo)
Mayor Sandra Bradbury, Mayors' Council (Pinellas Park)
Chief William Schobel, Pinellas County Fire Chiefs' Association (Primary)
Dr. Ulyee Choe, Pinellas County Health Department (Primary)
Dr. Anthony Ottaviani, Pinellas County Osteopathic Medical Society
Richard Schomp, Sunstar Paramedics (Primary)

Absent:

Christopher Markham, Citizen Representative (District 1)
OPEN, Citizen Representative (District 2)
Tina Ambrose, Citizen Representative (District 4)
Becca Tieder, Citizen Representative (District 5)
Chief Terry Tokarz, EMS Coordinator (Primary)
Chief Doug Zimmerman, EMS Coordinator (Alternate)
Mayor Anne-Marie Brooks, Mayors' Council (Madeira Beach)
Dr. Zachary Zimko, PEMHS, Mental Health Professional
Siomara Bridges-Mata, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Pinellas (Primary)
Camille Hebting, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Pinellas (Alternate)
Capt. Jose Camacho, Pinellas County Sheriff's Office
Dr. Matthew Liao-Troth, St. Petersburg College
Chief Lindsay Judah, St. Petersburg Fire & Rescue (Primary)
Chief Lindsey Kensinger, St. Petersburg Fire & Rescue (Alternate)

Staff Present:

Matt Spoor, Assistant County Administrator
James Fogarty, Bureau Director, Safety & Emergency Services
Dave Hare, Deputy Director, Safety & Emergency Services
Craig Hare, Director, EMS & Fire Administration

Jodie Sechler, Director, Ambulance Billing and Financial Services
Pam Bell, Regulatory Compliance Manager, Ambulance Billing and Financial Services
Dr. Angus Jameson, Medical Director
Dr. Morgan Uebelacker, OMD
Patrick Allman, County Attorney's Office
Jessica McGlothlin, Safety & Emergency Services
Thomas Hund, Safety & Emergency Services
Lynn Abbott, EMS & Fire Administration
Marianne Merola, EMS & Fire Administration
Ashley Giovannetti, Communications

Also Present:

Fire Chaplain Rev. John Ekers, All First Responders Matter
Linda Ruble, Citizen
Chief Jason Gennaro, Oldsmar Fire and Rescue
Chief Scott Sanford, Palm Harbor Special Fire Control District
Chief Andrew Hughes, Pinellas Park Fire Department
Chief Chris Wilfong, Pinellas Suncoast Fire Rescue
Commissioner Jacob Knighton, Pinellas Suncoast Fire Rescue
Chief Mark Keenan, Seminole Fire Rescue
Jazmin Soloman, Sunstar Paramedics

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Chairman Kevin Kenney 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 13 voting members in attendance.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

INVOCATION

Invocation by Fire Chaplain Rev. John Ekers, All First Responders Matter. Rev. Ekers presented Chairman Kenney with an All First Responders Matter tee shirt and shared that a free breakfast is held on the first Friday of every month for all Fire, Law Enforcement, Sunstar and 9-1-1 folks. Restaurant locations and times for Pinellas, Pasco and Manatee Counties can be found at <https://mobile.allfirstrespondersmatter.org/first-friday-breakfasts-florida-copy.shtml>.

MINUTES OF THE JUNE 27, 2025 MEETING - APPROVED

Upon presentation by Chairman Kenney, a motion was made by Comm. Jorge Mercado, seconded by Mayor Dave Gattis and unanimously approved, that the minutes of the June 27, 2025 EMS Advisory Council meeting be approved.

CITIZENS TO BE HEARD

Linda Ruble, Citizen, relayed her concerns regarding the number of resources expended by high-utilizer patients of the 9-1-1 system in recent years and the impacts to First Responder and public safety. In response to her question to explain what measures/mitigation strategies are being taken to monitor/identify calls of this nature and ways to address this issue, Craig Hare and Dr. Jameson

indicated that the County is working on solutions to this issue, noting that the elderly population residing at home tend to need more medical care before transitioning into assisted living or nursing homes; and that Pinellas County Human Services and community partners are working on changes to improve appropriate access to care for elderly and homeless patients with mental health and/or substance abuse issues.

INTRODUCTIONS

The following members were welcomed and introduced:

- Matthew Spoor, new Assistant County Administrator.
- Chiefs William Schobel and William Barrs, representing the Pinellas County Fire Chiefs Association, primary and alternate, respectively.
- Andrew Hughes, the new Fire Chief of Pinellas Park.

SELECTION COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS TO RANK ORDER CANDIDATES AND FILL VACANCY

Comm. Jorge Mercado related that the Selection Committee met earlier today and reviewed the seven applicants to fill the open Citizen Representative District 2 position and future vacancies. The Selection Committee rank-ordered and recommended the nomination the following candidates to the Board of County Commissioners (BCC): 1. Anthony Degina, 2. Christopher Hayes, 3. Steven C. LeCroy, 4. Gregory Childers, 5. Jacob Knighton, 6. Chad Gobel, and 7. Alisa L. Solomon. Comm. Mercado provided background information on Mr. Degina and the well-rounded list of candidates.

Following discussion, Comm. Jorge Mercado moved, seconded by Richard Schomp, that Anthony Degina be nominated to serve as the Citizen Representative for District 2, and Christopher Hayes, Steven C. LeCroy, Gregory Childers, Jacob Knighton, Chad Gobel, and Alisa L. Solomon be rank ordered to fill future EMSAC vacancies. Upon call for the vote, the motion was unanimously approved.

PRE-AUTHORIZATION PRESENTATION

Mr. Fogarty indicated that while pre-authorization has traditionally been viewed as a business issue, it is increasingly becoming a clinical concern. There are growing financial and ethical implications for patients and the EMS system. Pre-authorization involves obtaining approval before providing ambulance services to ensure insurance coverage. A growing number of insured patients are being denied coverage due to lack of pre-authorization, resulting in significant financial burdens estimated at around \$1 million annually.

Mr. Fogarty sent a letter in July to all stakeholders, hospitals, and skilled nursing facilities requesting pre-authorization compliance when scheduling ambulance services. He stressed that this problem is not new, and its impact has escalated, prompting broader stakeholder input. In June 2025 alone, 900 citizens had their accounts sent to collections, often unaware they were responsible for ambulance bills. The issue primarily affects non-emergency transports from hospitals and skilled nursing facilities where patients cannot use alternative transportation. Despite longstanding efforts, many facilities still lack awareness or systems to provide pre-authorization numbers.

Mr. Fogarty shared that the following presentation is to inform the Council about the issue and the scope of the problem, noting that service delivery is not a part of the issue. The Medical Control Board was briefed in July and again yesterday, and their suggestion was that the County continue to work cooperatively with their partners to develop some reasonable solutions.

Jodie Sechler, Director of Financial Services, and Pam Bell, Regulatory Compliance Manager, conducted a PowerPoint presentation titled *Prior Authorization Issue Overview* and delivered a brief overview of the pre-authorization process and discussed the following topics:

- General Information. Sunstar will not refuse a request.
- Current Impacts.
- Sunstar Non-Emergency Transportation Volume.
- Recent Actions to address this Issue.
- Challenges to Ambulance Prior Authorization.
- Potential Solutions.

During the presentation, Ms. Bell, with input by Ms. Sechler and Messrs. Fogarty and C. Hare, relayed key points, as follows:

- Financial impacts/program costs.
- Transport origin/destination pathways and preauthorization/billing processes.
- Medicaid/Medicare Part C/commercial insurance non-emergency transport criteria and billing policies.
- Continuing Sunstar transport data compilation.
- Challenges faced by hospitals/Sunstar in getting preauthorization approval.
- Citizen accounts in collections/payment plans to avoid collection services.
- Sabal Palms Children's Rehabilitation Center's non-emergency transport violations.
- Meeting and working with all facilities to resolve issues.

Following the presentation, discussion ensued regarding the challenges surrounding emergency and non-emergency medical transports, particularly in relation to insurance authorization delays, system capacity, potential implications of outsourcing non-emergency transport service, and tentative solutions to include alternate modes of transport when necessary.

Mr. Fogarty indicated that the County wanted to present information on the current situation and does not expect a vote today, reiterating that the implementation date for the required preauthorization for non-emergency ambulance service for hospital and skilled nursing facility (SNF) discharges is planned for November 1. Mr. C. Hare shared that the workgroup would continue to meet with Dave Hare and hospitals to work towards a solution, thanking the members for their continued collaboration.

EMS DIRECTOR REPORT

Craig Hare provided an overview of the following topics:

Hospital Data Sharing (Health Information Hub – HIH)

- Agreements with hospitals are progressing, and many are in the signature phase.

- Goal is to achieve full data sharing by early 2026 to improve coordination and response.

Training & Clinical Advancements

- Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) training is complete for 1,100+ paramedics.
- Special recognition given to Clinical Manager Sean Davenport and agency instructors for outstanding execution.

ALS First Responder Agreements

- First Responder Agreements are progressing through city councils and fire boards, with over half already approved. Remaining agreements are scheduled for upcoming approval.
- Dunedin will operate a new rehab trailer and tow vehicle. The unit features a cooling chamber, hydration, and nutrition support for crews.
- Eight paramedics are being added in St. Petersburg as part of a three-year plan to phase in 24 new positions.
- Other system enhancements have been temporarily paused to ensure financial sustainability amid collective bargaining and salary adjustments.

New Initiatives

- Advanced Practice Paramedics (APP) planning is underway to expand the role of Rescue Lieutenants and Ambulance Supervisors. Future capabilities include blood administration, IV pumps, advanced airway management, and video laryngoscopy.
- A \$150,000 EMS grant has been secured to support a new pre-hospital blood transfusion program, in early-stage planning with OneBlood and equipment vendors.

Medical Control Board

- Updated treatment protocols were approved yesterday by the Medical Control Board.
- Approximately \$5 million in new ambulances and supervisor vehicles are being introduced as part of the second year of the current contract.
- Construction of the Redington Beach EMS station is well underway, with completion expected by May or June 2026.
- Design work for the Bay Pines Fire Station is nearing completion.

Emergency Preparedness

- A large-scale Active Assailant drill was conducted in July in collaboration with the Sheriff's Office and 19 agencies, including all municipal fire departments and Sunstar.
- Approximately 80% of frontline personnel have now completed Active Assailant training.
- Command-level and field training has been completed; 2026 goals include more advanced scenario planning and a focus on mid-level leadership development.

Personnel Announcements

- Brett Schlatterer, former Fire Chief of Pinellas Park, will join the County as EMS Fire Administrative Manager.
- Ryan Mitchell has been promoted from Rescue Lieutenant to EMS Chief, succeeding Chief Andrew Hughes, who is now Fire Chief of Pinellas Park.
- Several leadership transitions were noted:
 - Chad Pittman: New Fire Chief, Clearwater Fire Rescue.
 - Mike Handoga: Promoted to Dunedin Fire Chief.
 - Terry Tokarz: Promoted to Dunedin Deputy Fire Chief.

- Matt Carpenter: Promoted to Fire Chief, Largo Fire Rescue.
- Andrew Hughes: Promoted to Pinellas Park Fire Chief.
- Ryan Mitchell: Promoted to Pinellas Park EMS Fire Chief.
- Brett Ciskoski: Promoted to Deputy Fire Chief, St. Petersburg.
- Chiefs Anthony Tedesco and Chad Pittman selected as City of Clearwater Fire Chief primary and alternate representation, respectively.

Recognition was given to all new leaders for their continued collaboration and contributions as stakeholders.

MEDICAL DIRECTOR REPORT

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

Clinical Enhancements

- IV Pump Deployment:
 - Single-channel IV pumps will be deployed on all Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulances beginning October 1, 2025.
 - Final approvals were secured through the Medical Control Board, and Sunstar is completing training for implementation.
- Pre-Hospital Blood Transfusion Protocols:
 - Clinical criteria for administering blood in the field were approved by the Medical Control Board.
 - While deployment logistics are still being finalized, the clinical framework is now in place to move the project forward.

First Responder Safety Focus for 2026

- First Responder safety will be a central focus in the coming year.
- The department will reevaluate rehab procedures, particularly considering recent events.
- A First Responder who participated in the recent Active Assailant suffered a medical emergency later that day. This underscores the importance of post-incident care and heat-related illness prevention.
- The deployment of a cooling trailer is a timely and critical step in supporting responder health.

Patient Safety & System Improvements

- Protocol Book Modernization
 - The current linked PDF format will be upgraded to an AI-supported mobile application to enhance usability for clinicians in the field.
- Response Gear Redesign:
 - Dr. Jameson proposed a redesign of EMS response gear to optimize layout and support cognitive performance under pressure.
- Safety Cross-Check Enhancements:
 - Updates are planned for safety verification procedures prior to medication administration and invasive interventions.
- Airway Management:

- The department will review and update airway management protocols, equipment, and training to align with best practices and improve patient outcomes.

Dr. Jameson concluded by noting that 2025 has been a productive year and expressed optimism for continued progress in 2026.

FIRE CHIEFS' REPORT

Chief William Schobel of the Pinellas County Fire Chiefs' Association reported that he had no updates to share at this time.

SUNSTAR REPORT

Richard Schomp provided a detailed operational update, highlighting key performance metrics and system improvements:

Ambulance Agreement & Fleet Upgrades

- Sunstar is concluding the first year of its new ambulance agreement with Pinellas County citizens, reporting strong progress and positive outcomes.
 - Vehicle refresh efforts are underway, including supervisor vehicles, interfacility transport vehicles, and Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulances.
- A total of 15 new ambulances are expected to be delivered by the end of December 2025, representing an investment of approximately \$4 million.

System Performance & Volume

- Transport volume is down approximately 1% year-over-year, reflecting a stabilization in demand post-hurricane.
- This contrasts with the typical 2% annual growth previously observed.
- In August, the system surpassed 400,000 unit hours deployed.
- By year-end, Sunstar anticipates reaching 430,000 unit hours to maintain service levels across the county.

Service Quality & Collaboration

- Emphasized the high level of service being delivered through the 9-1-1 system in partnership with Fire Rescue and local hospitals.
- Noted that the *circle of life* for patient care, from emergency response to hospital coordination, is functioning effectively and remains a priority.

Transport & Response Metrics

- Year-to-date figures include approximately 170,700 transports and over 230,000 total responses.

Mr. Schomp concluded his report by affirming Sunstar's commitment to excellence and community partnership.

AFFILIATES & STAKEHOLDERS

No reports or updates were provided by affiliates or stakeholders.

MEETING

The next EMSAC meeting is scheduled to be held in person on December 19, 2025, at 10:00 a.m., at the John Morroni EMS & Fire Administration Building, 12490 Ulmerton Road, Conference Room 130/132, Largo, Florida 33774.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Kenney adjourned the meeting at 11:23 a.m.

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