

POSITION ON EMERGENCY SERVICES

The League of Women Voters of Saratoga County believes that all individuals in Saratoga County are entitled to a basic level of fire response, police response, and emergency medical response, regardless of their place of residence or ability to pay.

We believe that combining Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and fire Response in one organization would result in quicker response times (especially if EMS were co-located in all buildings housing the more numerous fire departments) and a more efficient delivery of services. Efficiency would be gained through streamlining of administration, more effective deployment of personnel, efficiencies in the use of buildings. We believe that combining EMS and Fire services should be a goal that we in this county work toward in all situations where the staff of the fire departments and the staff of the EMS are all paid employees.

We believe that paid employees can be required to have the level of cross training necessary to make the combined response work. But we don't think that having a combined service is a goal the county should work toward where the staff of the services are all volunteer or some combination of paid and volunteer. We believe that trying to require cross training of volunteers will not be effective (no matter how desirable) and will just result in a reduction of the total supply of volunteers.

The League believes that the current government methods for EMS (private non-profit corporations, town government, ambulance districts) are acceptable. Also acceptable would be governance by the county government. A for-profit ambulance service would not be acceptable. Additionally, we believe that county government is the preferable level for taxing and distribution of funds and for administration of Emergency Medical Services.

Methods of funding for EMS that are acceptable are: tax district (local); fee for service; and the county wide tax. Communities need a diversified funding mechanism to provide services in order to make them available to all regardless of income. Private fund-raising should not be relied on for basic services; it is only acceptable if used for optional items (such as incentives for volunteers). So long as EMS staff is required to have the same training to perform the same duties, we find acceptable methods of staffing EMS to be: all volunteer, combination of paid and volunteer, all paid. We are cognizant of the trend towards more and more paid staff (usually supported in large part by fee for service payments).

Methods of funding Fire departments that are acceptable are: tax district (local) and a countywide tax. Private fund-raising should not be relied on for basic services; it is only acceptable if used for optional items (such as incentives for volunteers). Fee for service is not an acceptable method of funding fire response, as public safety might be compromised.

We believe that the confusion and delay in the provision of emergency services that can result from ambiguous, duplicate or unpredictable numbering of addresses and from inadequately labeled properties should be remedied by authorizing the county to adopt binding rules for the numbering of properties throughout the county.

Because county-wide taxes support the Sheriff's Department, the League believes that the county should subsidize the local (city, village, and town) police departments at the per person rate it costs to provide Sheriff's Department services to those areas served by the Sheriff's Department.