

# Board of Supervisors seek public opinion regarding Emergency Medical Service

SHELBY COUNTY (5/19/2023)— Shelby County voters will have the opportunity to voice their opinion on whether or not they feel funding emergency medical service (EMS) is essential.

The Board of Supervisors has drafted a resolution and is asking for public response to declare EMS as an essential service in Shelby County at three separate public hearings, scheduled for May 23, June 6, and June 13, each at 10 a.m. at the Courthouse.

A state law passed last year allows counties to designate EMS an essential service, thereby providing funds to support it.

“When people dial 911, they assume and expect someone is going to be there in a few minutes. That might not be the case any more. If we are going to give money for someone do it privately, we just as well try to be more efficient, do it ourselves, and not make a profit,” Shelby County Board of Supervisors Chairman Steve Kenkel said.

Following the public hearings, the Shelby County Board of Supervisors must decide 60 days prior to the November 7, 2023 Election Day as to whether or not this will be put on the ballot. If the measure goes to a public vote in November, 60% of the votes must be in favor for it to pass.

Currently, Medivac, a private ambulance service located in Harlan, provides the majority of emergency medical service in Shelby County.

Kenkel said he is surprised EMS has never been designated as an essential service by the state and publicly funded. “It really is amazing this never was an essential service. Law enforcement, public safety, road maintenance— that’s all an essential service. You would think this would fall right into this category.”

In January, the Board of Supervisors voted to establish an EMS System Advisory Council, consisting of Chairperson, Tim Plumb, Shelby County ESA; Bryce Schaben, Vice Chair, Board of Supervisors; Alex Londo, Secretary, EMA; Roger Bissen, Fire Chief, City of Harlan; Karen Schlueter, City of Shelby; Janice Gaul, City of Earling; and Barry Jacobsen, Myrtue Medical Center.

The Advisory Council assessed the needs for an EMS system, and has proposed the creation of a county-wide EMS system, which will include both a county-wide ambulance service and volunteer departments.

The Advisory Council’s recommendation is 75 cents per thousand dollars of taxable valuation (not assessed valuation), and a 1% income tax would be collected by the state and apportioned to the Shelby County EMS Fund. The EMS Fund will financially support all of the Shelby County Ambulance and Emergency Response teams, as well as local volunteer emergency medical response agencies.

Kenkel credits the area volunteer agencies. “If it wasn’t for the volunteers, this would have happened decades ago. Those volunteer groups have been dwindling and dwindling by no fault of their own,” Kenkel said. “They have saved the county millions and millions of dollars over the years that we didn’t think about and took for granted, so we aren’t pushing them out. This is to work together and be a team. If the volunteers went away, this would cost us even more.”

“I know it’s an expense and another cost, but what are our priorities? We are giving the people the opportunity to decide.”