



Auditor of Ross County

ROBYN M. BREWSTER

Tuesday, July 5, 2022

To: Ross County Commissioners

RE: Huntington Township Fire and EMS Budget

Dear Sirs:

In recent weeks, Huntington Township has faced a budgetary crisis. Specifically, with their Fire Department's Emergency Medical Service. It has been alleged by the trustees that their budget for the department's operations for a 24/7 EMS is running out.

As I look over current and past finances of the township, I can see that the primary funding for the EMS service has been from a grant that the township received a few years ago. That grant is coming to end this year, so it puts the service that many have come reliant upon in jeopardy. The township has applied for the grant; however, they have not yet been awarded such grant.

While the trustees plead poverty, one thing is for certain: the way the township officials have their budget currently allocated, the funding for life-saving care is going to run dry. To put it plainly: dedicated EMS coverage in Huntington Township will not exist much longer. We are talking months, if not weeks before the service is cut.

In recent meetings, the trustees and the township's fiscal officer have proposed measures that have drawn back EMS service, which includes cutting hours, employees – and at times, have even suggested leaving the ambulance without overnight staffing.

In a township that has a populated school, major highways, and an aging elderly population, along with new families and young children, we cannot allow such a service to go bankrupt; at least not without the voters having their say.

We can point fingers all day long and make suggestions on how the township could fiscally plan their budget, but at the end of the day, if the majority of the Board of Trustees

do not want to allocate the appropriate funding to a certain budgetary item – in this instance, EMS – then we cannot force them. The only recourse for their actions – or inactions – would be for their seats to be challenged in the next respective regular elections, which are more than a year away.

The people who live in the township, including the thousands of people who travel along route 23 and 772 on a daily basis, are facing deadly consequences from the decision of three people. In the end, this decision should be left up to the voters to decide. This is their home, their families, and their lives.

With the way things are fiscally structured in Huntington Township, their EMS will run out of money before the year's end, and that simply cannot happen, at least not until the voters can have their say. The lifelines the EMS provides for the citizens will be taken away and that is not fair. My mother died in Waverly in 2016. My father tried many times to reach 911 to get an ambulance to their house. My father finally called Adena Medical in Pike County and they called a squad for him. I often wonder if those minutes they had to wait for a squad cost my mother her life.

As elected officials, we should know it is not appropriate to play God and have a single say regarding life-saving care to the more than 6,000 citizens who live in Huntington Township, tens of thousands of motorists, and surrounding township citizens that live in, near, or visit the Township each day. That decision should be left up to the voters, and solely the voters to decide at the Ballot Box. It is the people's money, the people's health, and the people's care. The decision to continue – or discontinue EMS service is the "people's decision", and we must give them the opportunity to express it.

That is why, in this letter, I am proposing that the County Commissioners allocate money to aid the township's EMS service to stay fiscally viable until a ballot measure can be voted upon by the people. If the voters decide in an election not to renew or add additional EMS funding, then that is their right. We should respect their decision whatever it may be, but to do that, we must be good stewards of the offices we hold and give the people the opportunity to decide.

Until such a decision is made by the people at the ballot box, I am proposing that the County Commissioners allocate money from account "100-01-15-7450." By doing this, EMS services in Huntington Township can continue to operate and potentially save lives, until the people have had their say.

Historically, account 100-01-15-7450 has been used by the County to offer grants to other agencies to assist in funding operations for a variety of reasons. As we look at account 100-01-15-7450, it currently sits with a balance of \$2,000. While that will not be enough to “save” EMS in Huntington Township, the County Commissioners can transfer additional funds into this account from the County’s general fund, which has an unappropriated balance of approximately \$9.2 million sitting at the County’s leisure.

The township has brought to my office a request for a 1 mill additional levy for this upcoming election. The Estimated Property Tax Revenue from this levy would be \$79,419. That will be an additional \$35 per \$100,000 evaluation on property taxes for EMS coverage. The money that the County would provide to the Township to help them through this challenging time can have a host of terms. For example, the money could simply be a loan at 0% interest paid back overtime if the new levy passes, or it could be a gift.

I want to be very clear: this letter is not pro-tax or anti-tax. This recommendation is a request that we aid until November to keep services status quo, while the decision is left to the people, where it belongs. It should not matter in which township people live; they should feel safe.

Sincerely,

Robyn M. Brewster
Ross County Auditor