

Siuslaw News
P.O. Box 10
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Opinion

The First Amendment
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

“I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend.” — Thomas Jefferson (1800)

WHAT SEPARATES WLAD FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR

(Editor’s Note: Viewpoint submissions on this and other topics are always welcome as part of our goal to encourage community discussion and exchange of perspectives.)

I was a paramedic at Western Lane Ambulance from 2009-16. I first started with Western Lane Ambulance as a paramedic student intern, and was hired soon after graduation. During this time, I was taught by some of the best paramedics in the state and was able to gain a strong foundation in medicine that set me up for success in my current career as a physician.

The training, knowledge and experience I received working with Western Lane Ambulance set me apart from other medical students. I have a skillset years above my education level in medical school and residency. No other former paramedics I have met along my medical training journey have experienced the level of high-acuity cases, expanded procedural protocols and medication protocols that are basic necessities for serving the greater Florence area due to the age/medical needs of the population and sheer geographic distance of the district.

I directly attribute my medical skills and patient care abilities to where I started in a small town: taking care of a community that needs high-quality critical care paramedics in order to meet the basic needs of their citizens.

Western Lane Ambulance had a

very experienced crew that ranged from three to 30 years of experience when I worked there. This lack of turnover and years of continuity in training has rewarded the community with well-experienced and invaluable personnel.

The greater Western Lane area

GUEST VIEWPOINT
By Dr. David Hundley, DO
Former WLAD Paramedic and Florence Resident

is unique in its patient care needs, with an advanced aging population presenting high critical-care needs at an increased frequency compared to a younger population; large population growth with summer tourism; and a vast geographic area to service, frequently without cellular service to connect personnel to their physician medical director.

Such a unique community will not be adequately served by a private ambulance with the high turnover in employees, lack of experience in employees and lower salary/inability to recruit high quality employees that is so common in the private sector. A private ambulance company will not know Florence like the WLAD employees that have dedicated their entire careers to improving the emergency medical service for their fellow citizens. A for-profit ambulance company will need to factor their profits over the needs of the community.

WLAD was able to provide me with the best equipment available.

Interfacility transport of critically ill patients to RiverBend was almost a daily occurrence. I frequently had to transport intubated patients. We obtained top-of-the-line ventilators to provide our patients the best care possible in those scenarios. This important tool — along with others such as new ambulances, gurneys and more — is what separates WLAD from the private sector. While it can be costly to provide our paramedics and EMTs with this equipment, in the end the patients win, because WLAD’s patient care is second to none. Having top-of-the-line equipment can save critical time, which can mean the difference between life and death.

Finally, the close relationship that Western Lane Ambulance has with Peace Harbor Medical Center and Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue is an important aspect of the quality of emergency medical services provided to Western Lane County. The cultural core of these three separate but intertwined entities is to work together to do what is best for the people they serve.

Disrupting WLAD’s funding by not renewing the levy would be severely detrimental to the entire emergency medical service system in the greater Florence area. To continue the same high quality care you experience now, at no increase of cost to taxpayers, is worth the continued financial support to WLAD.

You deserve the best of the best, and WLAD provides that to Western Lane County.



Are Western Lane Ambulance Supervisors overpaid?

(Editor’s Note: Viewpoint submissions on this and other topics are always welcome as part of our goal to encourage community discussion and exchange of perspectives.)

I have been a board member serving with Western Lane Ambulance District since 2005. This letter represents my opinion, not that of the district or the board of directors.

Western Lane Ambulance District (WLAD) has been accused of having the highest rate of pay for supervisors in the State of Oregon. Is this true?

A little background: WLAD Captains (supervisors) are typically the more experienced employees in the district. Our three captains average 26 years with WLAD. They are all “Critical Care” Certified Paramedics. Oregon has in total, under 130 Critical Care Certified Paramedics in the entire state, many of which work for air ambulance services often transporting the most critical, time sensitive patients.

Here in the Western Lane Ambulance District, you have a total of 10 Critical Care Paramedics currently working for you. Critical Care Certified Paramedics also meet requirements established by PeaceHealth, which allows WLAD to transport the most critical patients to RiverBend when higher levels of care are required. Often, unless time is critical, our ability to transport saves the tax-

payer the cost of an air ambulance, which can exceed \$30,000.

So how does our pay compare to both for-profit and public agencies? American Medical Response, Inc, (AMR) a for-profit ambulance agency located in the Portland area, as of July 1, 2021: Paramedic starting

GUEST VIEWPOINT
By Mike Webb
Florence resident

base salary is \$60,991/year. After 12 years, their base salary increases to \$84,664/year. The supervisor pay scale was not available.

WLAD Paramedic starting base pay as of July 1, 2021, is \$62,207/year. At WLAD, the top paramedic base salary is \$81,689/year.

WLAD Captains are paid a premium to supervise their crews. For that additional responsibility, starting base salary is \$71,538/year. The top base salary is \$93,942.

From an average of 32 Oregon-based Fire/EMS (public) agencies: a captain’s average starting base salary is \$75,909/year. The average top base salary is \$94,458/year.

Based on the above, base salaries for WLAD are very comparable to both for-profit and public agencies.

The above groups pay overtime, but overtime is not included in the base salaries listed above. And overtime can add significantly to annual pay. It is not uncommon for

paramedics and EMTs at WLAD to increase their pay 25% or more by taking optional overtime shifts when demand for services supports it. And demand in the district often supports additional staff, particularly in the summer.

Reducing response expectations is not an acceptable option, so to offset overtime, the only realistic option would be to add employees. Currently, at least for WLAD, it is less expensive to pay overtime than to add crews.

WLAD works hard to provide the emergency high-quality medical transport services the people of our district deserve while doing its best to properly manage the resources entrusted in us by taxpayers. Our meetings and our books are always open. Public input is more than welcome — it is necessary.

WLAD first requested the current operating levy of \$0.45/\$1,000 assessed value in 2012, and in 2012, WLAD responded to fewer than 2,600 calls. This year we are on record pace and fully expect to respond to more than 4,000 calls. And this year we are requesting a renewal of the operating levy at a level not changed since 2012.

I ask you for your support this November to preserve Western Lane Ambulance District funding at its current level. Vote Yes on Measure #20-322 to renew the \$0.45/\$1000 Local Option Levy.

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Siuslaw News

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The *Siuslaw News* welcomes Letters to the Editor and Guest Viewpoints as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Email letters to cmeyer@thesiuslawnews.com

TO BE CONSIDERED FOR PUBLICATION:

- Letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large. In addition:
- Letters reflect the opinion of the writer. The *Siuslaw News* cannot verify the accuracy of all statements made in letters. Authors should ensure any information is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay, and include sources where possible.
 - Letters have a suggested 300-word limit and may be edited for grammar and clarity.
 - Authors must sign their full name and include their street address (only city will be printed), as well as a daytime phone number and/or email address for verification. The person who signs the letter must be the actual author. *Siuslaw News* does not accept anonymous Letters to the Editor.
 - *Siuslaw News* will not print form letters, libelous letters, business promotions or personal disputes, poetry, open letters, letters espousing religious views without reference to a current issue, or letters considered in poor taste. Letters also may not be part of letter-writing campaigns.
 - Writers are limited to one published letter every two weeks.

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Emailed submissions are preferred. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed.

The newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn’t follow the above criteria.

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