Emergency Medical Services—Considerations for the County Commissioners

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COUNTY COMMISSIONERS CAN CONTRACT FOR EMERGENCY AMBULANCE SERVICES

County commissioners have the power to contract for ambulance services under IC 1971, 17-2-27, which states:

"Sec. 1. Any board of county commissioners in the state of Indiana may contract either regular or emergency ambulance service within the respective county. The board of county commissioners may fix and provide for the collection of fees for the services rendered or to be rendered under the provisions of such contracts or contracts.

Sec. 2. The granting of such a contract shall be governed, insofar as applicable, by the provisions of Chapter 99, Acts of 1945, as amended." [Note: Chapter 99, Acts of 1945 refers to bidding procedures.]

Under this statute, several counties in Indiana have already contracted for emergency ambulance services, and there are several more who have the problem under consideration at the present time. With the passage of Acts of 1974, P.L. 55 (Senate Bill 151, the emergency medical services bill), it is likely that even more counties will want to contract for emergency medical services.

REASONS FOR COUNTY WANTING TO CONTRACT

The reasons for a county wanting to contract for services are several. The major reason why most counties have contracted is simply because the private ambulance services in local communities are finding it increasingly difficult to stay in business without some sort of subsidy from government. Many have said that unless they receive some support from
the community, they will fold, and the community will be left with no emergency ambulance service whatever.

**FACTORs IN DEVELOPING EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE**

If the provision of emergency medical services is a problem in your county, what should the commissioners do, and what sort of questions should they ask? First, they should ask whether the county really needs to support emergency medical services or not. If that answer is in the affirmative, then these factors must be considered:

1. Who will provide the needed services? Usually, the answer will be, a private company.
2. What is the general community reputation of the company or companies under consideration?
3. What are the possibilities for public or volunteer provision of emergency medical services? (E.g., volunteer fire departments, police departments, civil defense, etc.)
4. What sort of standards should be set for the provisions of services? How many vehicles are necessary? How many employees will be required? How long will it take for a company to respond to a call?
5. Qualifications should be examined carefully to insure that the company meets minimum standards, e.g., ambulance and emergency equipment must meet certain minimum standards, personnel should have adequate training, communications equipment should be modern and in good repair, the company should have enough personnel and equipment to meet expected needs of the community, etc.
6. How much will it cost the county? Should the county merely provide a grant to a local company, and let the company then charge the user of the service? Should the county provide free or nominal cost service to the citizens? Should the operation be operated at cost, or at a profit for the private company?
7. Where will the money come from? Obviously, the citizens will pay. The statute provides that the county commissioners may fix and set rates. Will a tax levy be required?

These are but an introduction into the problems and questions which must be faced by the commissioner in considering whether or not to contract for emergency medical services. It is not an easy decision to make.
STATE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES IN 1975

I would suggest that commissioners examine carefully the need for emergency medical services, and see whether or not county participation can wait until 1975, when the state's new emergency medical services commission has had a chance to establish standards and guidelines for emergency medical services. This would make the job of the commissioner much easier.

CONCLUSION

Many counties can't and shouldn't wait until then. If a decision must be made soon, the county won't go wrong by setting its standards as high as possible—after all, the lives of its citizens are at stake.

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