



As Strike Looms, Statement Calling on Mayor Durkan to Bring All Emergency Medical Services In-House

Demands an end to a “culture of contracting out our safety net to profiteers”

Seattle stands hours away from losing Basic Life Support services as a result of a toxic combination of big business greed and a corporate political establishment that uses contracting out as an excuse for dodging its responsibilities to the city’s residents.

The 430 emergency medical technicians (EMTs) who serve our city with distinction and self-sacrifice, and who are proud members of Teamsters Local 763, are on the verge of striking. It is a courageous strike provoked only after months of fruitless negotiations with their for-profit employer, American Medical Response (AMR).

AMR’s response to the workers’ overwhelming strike vote – to refuse to bargain and instead to fly in replacement workers from around the country, at extraordinary expense – shows that the company doesn’t care about our health and safety, but rather about its own profits and control.

This is exactly why Seattleites should demand that the City stop relying on private, for-profit companies for emergency services. We do not contract out our fire services or advanced life support services. The premiere emergency medical facility in the region, the Harborview Medical Center, is publicly owned. Seattle’s water and electrical services are publicly owned and controlled. These resources are designed to serve people, not make profits. It makes absolutely no sense to contract out the emergency medical technicians who staff ambulances around our city, provide life-saving care every day, and work shoulder to shoulder with the City’s fire and hospital professionals.

In the recent negotiation for the City’s servicing contract with AMR, the Mayor completely failed to ensure that AMR would commit to paying workers fair wages and benefits, as directed by City Council Resolution 31831, which I introduced in August and which was unanimously adopted by the City Council.

Even more outrageous, AMR’s refusal to bargain a fair union contract with the EMTs seems also linked to the fact that the Mayor and the political establishment have given the corporation what appears to be its most lucrative servicing contract ever with the City of Seattle: The deal inked between the City and the company nearly triples the amount that the company is allowed to charge many patients, and eliminates annual payments of more than half a million dollars that AMR has been making to Seattle. This deal will only further enrich the company’s wealthy shareholders at the expense of EMTs and the ordinary people who rely on life-saving ambulance services.

We would not be at this crisis point today if the City hired emergency medical technicians directly, instead of contracting out the work to a company whose allegiance is to its major shareholders, not the public.

That is why I am issuing a call today to Mayor Durkan and the other members of the City Council to publicly join with me in asking the Seattle Fire Department to prepare a plan and budget for bringing Basic Life Support Services in-house, with seniority and Teamster union rights protected for all the workers, and with wages and benefits to be commensurate with Fire Department standards.

Seattle does not contract out its fire service or advanced life support service. Instead, dedicated, unionized members of the city's Fire Department perform this work 24/7/365, and are paid living wages and good benefits. The EMTs deserve nothing less than what their first-responder peers receive.

Other major cities, like New York, do not contract out emergency medical technicians. Neither should Seattle.

As the strike looms, it's more evident than ever that the safety of Seattleites must not be held hostage to corporate greed and a political culture of contracting out our safety net to profiteers.

I urge everyone to join me on the picket line in solidarity with the brave emergency medical technicians, and to organize to bring these services in-house where they belong.