

AI Summary: EMS - County Ambulance Request - Lake Shore Hospital Authority

At the June 8 Lake Shore Hospital Authority (LSHA) board meeting in Columbia County, FL, County officials requested \$1.63 million to buy three advanced life support ambulances, citing dangerously high emergency response times in the county's remote northern and southern areas.

Background: In 2011, the County privatized its EMS system—partly to bust the union—and is now on its fourth private contractor, AmeriPro, which is struggling with high call volumes, staffing shortages, and slow response times. When asked to rate AmeriPro's performance, County Manager David Kraus admitted: "They're slightly under 70%."

The county fielded 15,001 calls last year, straining the network severely. Board member Brandon Beil questioned the County's practice of issuing COPCNs (Certificates of Public Convenience and Necessity) to numerous operators—roughly eight to ten, plus helicopters. He pointedly asked: **"If we keep passing out COPCNs like candy on Halloween, how is anybody ever going to find staff?"**

The Pitch: Crawford requested upfront capital (\$1,221,672 for ambulances, \$407,663 for equipment) to deploy cross-trained firefighter-paramedics and bypass the failing AmeriPro contract. He claimed early funding could secure delivery by December -January, avoiding manufacturing delays. County Manager Kraus argued the ambulances directly serve hospitals, tying them to the Authority's mission.

Pushback: Residents Barbara Lemley and Stew Lilker (the reporter) argued the purchase violates the LSHA's enabling legislation, which is meant to fund indigent care. Lemley bluntly told the trustees: **"What you guys really need to do is just resign tonight - turn it all over to the county."**

The reporter pressed for data on the claimed "large population" of indigents and noted a missing map defining underserved zones.

Legal Questions: Attorney Todd Kennon advised that any aid must align with the enabling legislation, recommending a formal interlocal agreement with safeguards (county 911 use only, county-held title, LSHA reversion rights). Board member Jerry Bullard refused to support the proposal without a comprehensive county plan, while Don Kennedy backed it in principle. Chairman Stephen Douglas called legality **"the stickler,"** and the board made no commitment.

Epilogue: The County Commission ("County 5") was scheduled to meet to discuss the matter, though no supporting agenda information was available—leaving the outcome uncertain.