

Erin Cooper, Ambulance Director
North Haven EMS
January 19, 2022

Members of the Select Board, Town Administration, and Community of North Haven,

Four years ago, I became an Emergency Medical Technician so I could volunteer to help North Haven EMS. Returning from college after growing up on island, I was simply looking for a way to make a positive contribution to our community. After taking call as an EMT for only a short time, I was asked to take over as the Ambulance Director (commonly referred to as the "Crew Chief"). I felt privileged to be asked and eager to do my best in the position, diving headfirst into making necessary upgrades and overdue changes to the department. It was truly an honor to be filling such an important role, but I quickly found myself spread far too thin, particularly considering the volunteer nature of the position. I was desperate to give more time to NH EMS but couldn't give up one of my paying jobs to do so.

I want to make it clear that my goal here is not to complain or sound accusatory. It is to showcase two things. First, that pressuring someone into doing what amounts to a full-time job on a volunteer basis is categorically unfair, unreasonable, and unsustainable. Secondly, because of this, the Ambulance Director should be a full-time, paid position.

In 2020 alone, I was the lead EMT for 36 of the 44 EMS calls that required transport to the mainland. I was on-call for 318 days that year including weekends. I continue to maintain this type of coverage for the town to this day. In 2021, I was the lead EMT on 32 of the 41 transporting calls and spent a similar number of weeks on call as in the previous two years. Every member of the ambulance service, EMTs and drivers alike, volunteer as much time as they can to the department. However, no one can be expected to give up an inordinate amount of their lives for volunteer work. That leaves all the leftover and unfilled days and weeks as my responsibility to cover.

Being available and responding to emergency calls is only a fraction of what the Ambulance Director position entails. I am fully responsible for all the paperwork, licensing, scheduling, and training. I do all the QA/QI for our department and attend every mandatory regional and state meeting for Maine EMS. I wrote and now continually maintain SOPs completely from scratch because none existed until my tenure. I implement every rule and protocol change. I am responsible for all our equipment, inventory, and ordering. I updated or created every single document/form/etc. related to EMS. When the state looked to shut down our ability to evacuate patients with Penobscot Island Air, I single-handedly went through the process of licensing our department as a restricted response air ambulance service, preserving that crucial lifeline. Even when I am off-island, I am never truly "off-call" I still have to remain available for inquiries from Maine EMS, crew member issues, or questions from the town, public, etc.

When NH EMS was founded, there were very few rules or regulations, and the department could simply operate with little to no oversight from state or federal agencies. This is no longer the case. There are endless rules, regulations, and protocols in place today that require someone's full-time attention. North Haven EMS can remain a largely volunteer department, but the Ambulance Director must be a full-time employee. The expectations of the position are too serious and require too many hours for it to be performed on a volunteer basis.

Other issues cause this position to be unnecessarily overwhelming as well. For example, over the past year, the ambulance has broken down multiple times and has passed the end of

its safely useful life. I have campaigned tirelessly for a new station that can appropriately house a new ambulance, but my pleas have been repeatedly pushed aside. Critically important infrastructure improvements should be made preemptively, not as a reaction to tragedy. Do you know how long someone can survive after experiencing sudden cardiac arrest without emergency medical intervention, high-quality CPR, and defibrillation? Do you know how long it takes to jump-start an ambulance? I do, and the discrepancy keeps me awake at night. As a volunteer department, the least we deserve is to be provided with the equipment and facilities necessary to operate safely and effectively.

The day I was issued my pager was one of the proudest days of my life because I knew with complete confidence that I was doing exactly what I was meant to be doing. I had never had that feeling before and cherish the memory. Sadly, now when I clip my pager to my belt each day, I feel resentment. When my pager sounds, I no longer get a productive rush of adrenaline. Instead, I get a feeling of dread, fearing that the ambulance will not start, the equipment will not function, or that there won't be a competent advanced provider on the island and ultimately that someone I know and love will suffer because of it. This fear distracts me from being able to provide the highest quality care I can and has caused me to no longer feel comfortable serving in this position.

Therefore, please accept this as my official notice of resignation as the North Haven Ambulance Director effective February 4th, 2022. I strongly recommend that the position not be filled by a volunteer. Along with the considerable risk it creates, continuing in this manner is willfully taking advantage of a licensed healthcare provider in our community and that is unacceptable.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Erin Cooper", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Erin Cooper, EMT
Ambulance Director
North Haven EMS