



**Paramedic Association  
of  
Manitoba**

Submission to

**Standing Committee on Social and  
Economic Development**

**Bill 17 - The Firefighters, Peace Officers and Workers  
Memorial Foundations Act**

October 29, 2007

The Paramedic Association of Manitoba (PAM) is a voluntary membership professional association representing emergency medical services personnel licensed to practise in this province. Representative of both rural and urban practitioners, we strive to promote excellence in pre-hospital emergency health care and within our profession. The Paramedic Association of Manitoba is a chapter of the Paramedic Association of Canada, the professional organization representing over 14,000 paramedicine practitioners across Canada.

Our Association is not a union or labour organization. The mission statement for the Paramedic Association of Manitoba defines the organization as:

*“a professional association comprised of licensed pre-hospital practitioners across Manitoba, with a strong voice in EMS issues, that promotes the well-being, safety and appropriate medical treatment of our patients”.*

It is my pleasure, as the Chairman of the Paramedic Association of Manitoba, to address the Social and Economic Development Committee on the subject of Bill 17, *The Firefighters, Peace Officers and Workers Memorial Foundations Act*. In August of 2006, when the Honourable Gord Mackintosh publicly acknowledged the Government’s commitment to see permanent memorials built to recognize police officers, firefighters and paramedics who perished in the line of duty, we applauded his announcement. Today, as we meet to discuss Bill 17, I once again congratulate the Government for moving to recognize the many Manitobans, from all walks of life, who die each year in occupational mishaps.

In December of 2006 I was invited to meet with Mr. Michael Balagus to discuss possibilities for including Paramedics in proposed Memorial Foundation legislation. At that time he indicated that preliminary plans called for three memorials to be erected on the legislative grounds...one to recognize peace officers, a second to honor fallen firefighters and a third that would pay tribute to other workers. In that very brief meeting I acknowledged his concern about adding additional memorials to that proposal, and agreed that Paramedics may rightfully be served by exploring options to work within the planned framework, providing there was a means to appropriately recognize our profession. Respectfully, I can tell you that Paramedics across this province were very disappointed to see legislation introduced last April without recognizing the dangers faced day in and day out by our profession. It’s disheartening to see Bill 17 equally quiet in this respect.

The role of Paramedics is to respond to emergencies, provide medical services and transport patients to medical facilities. In many cases, the initial emergency care provided by Paramedics will be the deciding factor between life and death, temporary or permanent disability, a brief hospital confinement or prolonged hospitalization for a patient.

When responding to emergencies, Paramedics may not always be given an advanced understanding of the extent of the physical environment and subsequent emergency issues to which they will be exposed. In a critical situation Paramedics often experience unexpected and shocking events, for which most people would not be prepared. Paramedics are very often required to deliver their services in unregulated, uncontrolled, unpredictable, and often hazardous environmental situations.

While identified with the health care community due to the medical care scope of our practice, Paramedics serve along side Police and Firefighters in attending at, and dealing with, emergency situations and settings. Paramedics must be prepared to respond to unfolding emergency situations and settings beyond the medical situations to which we are initially responding. We will often be required to work within an emergency setting that is being dealt with by other "emergency services occupations". Examples of calls to which Paramedics would attend include working fires, domestic disputes, assaults, motor vehicle accidents, psychiatric emergencies, overdoses, and alcohol abuse to mention a few.

In March of this year, Paramedic Michael Jolin was fatally injured in an industrial accident while working at an oilfield site in northern Alberta.

Just two weeks prior to Jolin's death, 30 year old Paul Patterson died when he was ejected from his Paramedic Response Unit as it slid off an icy highway and rolled into the ditch. Paterson was responding to a motor vehicle collision near Chatham, Ontario.

In May of 2006, BC Paramedics Kim Weitzel and Shawn Currier were killed in the line of duty while they responded to a drowning call at a decommissioned mine site near Kimberley, British Columbia. Weitzel and Currier entered an abandoned water treatment building, frequented monthly by mining staff to test water samples, and were almost immediately overcome by a lack of oxygen.

Twenty-six year old Flight Paramedic Andrea Thompson collapsed and died suddenly while responding to a medevac call in Dryden, Ontario.

John Rossiter, a Paramedic with Emergency Health Services in Nova Scotia, was killed when his ambulance was struck by a tree uprooted by Hurricane Juan in September of 2003.

Closer to home, Manitoba EMS providers Keith Barrie and Manuel Caudros were killed in Beausejour in July of 1995 when their ambulance collided with a semi-trailer while responding to a nearby medical emergency at night. A third Paramedic suffered very serious injuries in that accident.

In the past 13 years, at least 20 Canadian Paramedics have been killed while on duty, often times working in situations and environments the general public is warned to avoid.

An American study presented in October of 2000 entitled "Occupational fatalities in emergency medical services: A hidden crisis" reported an annual fatality rate of 12.7 deaths per 100,000 Emergency Medical Services providers. This statistic compared with 14.2 annual fatalities for Police and 16.5 for Firefighters<sup>1</sup>. Occupations outside of these three emergency services roles had an estimated 5.0 deaths per 100,000 workers in a one year period. This study concluded an occupational fatality rate for EMS providers that far exceeded that of the general population and was comparable with that of other emergency public service professionals.

Regardless of the occupational environment, every Manitoban fatally injured while on duty in their workplace is worthy of our utmost respect. But the reality is that when an emergency arises, there is a public expectation that Police Officers, Firefighters and Paramedics will be there when they are needed most. I respectfully submit to this committee, for your consideration, that the extreme circumstances within which Paramedics operate and the very nature of the work we do deserves recognition similar to that of other emergency services occupations. It is our view that a single memorial recognizing all emergency service occupations would be appropriate. If that is not an acceptable option, then Bill 17 should be amended to allow for a Paramedic memorial to acknowledge the ultimate sacrifice made by Paramedics like our fallen Beausejour colleagues.

Thank you for your time today.

Eric Glass  
Chairman  
Paramedic Association of Manitoba

---

<sup>1</sup> Presented at the National Occupational Research Symposium, Pittsburgh, PA, Oct. 2000, and the New York State Vital Signs Conference, Albany NY, Oct. 2001, by Brian J. Maguire, Katherine L. Hunting, Gordon S. Smith and Nadine R. Levick