

Wood County Emergency Management Agency

Jeff Klein, EMA Director

A department under the Board of County Commissioners
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March 2, 2026

Honorable Terry Johnson
The Ohio Senate
Chair, Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety
Ohio Statehouse
Second Floor, Room 226
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Honorable Mr. Johnson:

My name is Jeff Klein, and I have been an Ohio resident for 63 years, currently residing in the City of Perrysburg in Wood County. I am writing in support of HB 311, which would designate the third full week of May as EMS Week in the State of Ohio.

I am currently the Director of the Wood County Emergency Management Agency, a role I have held for the past eight years. Prior to this position, I began my career in 1981 as a basic EMT and progressed to paramedic firefighter in 1985. My final ten years in the fire service were spent as Fire Chief for the City of Perrysburg. I have also had the privilege of serving as President of the Ohio Fire Chiefs Association (2016–2017) and the Emergency Management Association of Ohio (2022–2023).

I support the designation of EMS Week not only to honor those working in EMS, but also—more importantly—to educate the public.

Most people do not realize how rapidly prehospital EMS has evolved. In 1966, the Department of Transportation released the landmark report “Accidental Death and Disability,” which helped shape modern EMS. Prior to the 1970s, most EMS was provided by funeral homes and private ambulance companies, and when training existed, it was typically no more than a one-day American Red Cross course. During the 1970s, EMS training became standardized and widely adopted based on national standards from the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians.

During my early training, we were constantly reminded, “You are not doctors—just paramedics.” Early field operations resembled the TV show *Emergency!*: call the hospital and ask for permission. Paramedics were not trusted to make life-and-death decisions. Today, paramedics notify medical control to advise them of the care already being provided and to prepare the hospital for the patient’s arrival.

For example, if you experience chest pain today, paramedics can perform the same 12-lead EKG used in hospitals. They can identify the potential location of a heart blockage and begin the appropriate treatment immediately—reducing heart damage, shortening hospital stays, and improving survival rates. This information is relayed to the receiving hospital, where in many cases the cardiac catheterization team is standing by.

When I completed paramedic training in 1984, full-time programs in Ohio lasted approximately 12 weeks, or nine months for part-time students. Instruction was provided by an ad hoc group of doctors, nurses, paramedics, and other medically trained personnel. Today, paramedic training typically takes one to two years and includes college-level coursework such as anatomy and physiology.

Unfortunately, while training, responsibility, and patient outcomes have increased, pay and public recognition have not. EMS call volumes continue to rise due to an aging population and growing public expectations, which in some areas overtax available EMS units. This demand sometimes prevents citizens from receiving the level of care they need, such as advanced life support rather than basic life support.

What I believe would surprise most Ohioans is that there is no requirement for communities to provide EMS at any level. Local EMS providers assist Ohio residents daily with non-emergency calls—often from individuals who have fallen and cannot get up. While these may not be the lifesaving actions we typically associate with EMS, they help residents remain safely in their homes and avoid long-term care placement.

EMS Week will help start an important dialogue between local EMS providers and the communities they serve to identify what level of service is appropriate and necessary. We all lead busy lives and may not always focus on the essential services we rely upon. Recognizing EMS Week in Ohio is a crucial step toward making our state safer, better prepared, and more resilient for all citizens.

Respectfully,



Jeff Klein
Director
Wood County Emergency Management Agency