

Paramedic asks Texas lawmakers to protect first responders by voting for SB 6

LEGISLATION

By **David Yates** | Mar 22, 2021



Sen. Hancock

AUSTIN – Tomorrow, the Pandemic Liability Protection Act (Senate Bill 6) will be heard by the Senate Committee on Business & Commerce.

The Record has obtained some of the written testimony that will be submitted to lawmakers, including testimony offered by a paramedic who says first responders should not be held liable unless care is grossly lacking.

Earlier in the session, Gov. Greg Abbott declared pandemic liability protection as an emergency item.

SB 6, which was introduced by Sen. Kelly Hancock, seeks to provide COVID liability protections for health care providers, businesses, religious institutions and schools that follow safety protocols.

Chris Briggs, a paramedic out of Parker County, is urging lawmakers to protect him and other first responders by passing the bill.

“Once inside the ambulance, we’re in a confined space with not much air circulation,” reads Briggs’ testimony. “The patient is sick, probably COVID-infected, and I’m two feet from their face. I’ve got to save that person. But I also must keep myself and my fellow EMT partner safe.

“One mistake, and we put ourselves and our colleagues at risk. One mistake could eliminate our entire shift at work, and patients lose critical care. We have never faced anything like COVID.”

Briggs says COVID has changed paramedic treatment options, compounding their workload and adding to their physical and mental stress.

“We’ve had to learn on the fly and deal with a steady stream of unknowns,” Briggs’ testimony states. “We put ourselves at risk when answering every emergency call ... and may be putting our family members at risk.

“First responders should not be expected to have known or overcome every COVID concern. Paramedics deserve a higher standard of care when rendering treatment during this pandemic unless they acted recklessly.”

Because of the pandemic, Briggs says paramedics have to retrain themselves on safety protocols almost on a daily basis and that decontamination procedures have doubled turnaround time.

But despite the precautions, Briggs says first responders still get sick and so other EMTs have to pick up the slack, turning a 24-hour shift into a 72-hour shift.

“When you’re tired, you’re more apt to make a mistake,” states Briggs’ testimony. “Parker County residents are now left with two less than ideal choices: Either no one responds to your emergency, or you get an exhausted paramedic.

“This pandemic has produced many unique, extenuating, and trying circumstances. Paramedics should not be held liable for any lapse in patient care or safety unless that care is grossly lacking. Please protect us. Please vote in favor of SB 6.”

SB 6 and its companion bill, HB 3659, represent the joint efforts over the past year of the Texas Civil Justice League and Texas Alliance for Patient Access.