



March 13, 2019

The Hon. Christina Grey, Minister of Labour
Government of Alberta
107 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
T5K 2B6

Re: Paramedic Core-Flex Staffing Model

Dear Minister Gray:

The Alberta Paramedic Association (the Association) is a non-profit volunteer organization. The directive of the Association is to establish a representative society to serve as a voice for Paramedics within their professional practice.

On July 17, 2018 we brought to your attention the Core-Flex model of work which was instituted by Alberta Health Services too many ambulance operations across the province of Alberta. The majority of these ambulance operations lie within the rural part of Alberta.

You responded on August 2, 2018 and directed us towards working through collective agreements and to review the *Employment Standards Code* (the Code). You also referred us to the Director of Employment Standards Policy and Legislation. We recognize that as the Minister of Labour, you are ultimately responsible for what is occurring in Alberta. We believe that you were not fully hearing our concerns as presented and wish to inform you of the following:

We acknowledge collective agreements and the Code. We understand that collective agreements cannot break employment law as legislated within the Code. With this understanding, we have made you aware that Paramedics within the province of Alberta are working up to 96 hours (4, 24-hour days) straight within a system that allows operators to exceed your maximum 12 consecutive hours per day as identified in s.16 of the Code. As such, this would indicate that you are approving exemptions in some cases through a Ministerial Variance, or allowing ambulance operators outside of the normal confines of the legislation. We wish to point out that collective agreements are strongly influenced by Alberta Health Services (AHS) through the limitation of funding to operators or by influencing negotiations through funding. Being that AHS is the operational arm of the Government of Alberta (GOA) through the Ministry of Health, we may surmise that the Ministry of Labour is allowing other arms of government to directly influence collective agreements while breaking the Code without retribution.

As we look further to the *Employment Standards Regulation* (the Regulation), Division 1 outlines the provision of ambulance attendants (paramedics) to working 14 hours at or after 4pm and also speaks to on-call duties. There is however, no definition of on-call duties in either the Code or the Regulation. The current Core-Flex model manipulates the practice of on-call to meet the model's time on task philosophy which allows the random accumulation of hours within a 24-hour period to maximize the 14-hour allowance within the Regulation. Section 16(1) of the Code states that employers **must** confine the work day to 12 consecutive hours. In s.17(2) it identifies 8 consecutive hours of sleep between shifts. This is certainly not the case in the Core-Flex model as no person can be guaranteed any of these minimums within a 24 hour period.

Since the Core-Flex model forces these practices outside of Code, we feel that in part, you are jeopardizing the safety of not only our paramedics but also Albertans. We understand that the Code and the Regulation outline the minimums. The current expectation is that Paramedics must be alert at all times, outside the confines of the Code, to perform life saving procedures. This is now resulting in paramedics reporting excessive fatigue and micro sleeps while providing patient care or operating emergency vehicles; paramedics performing critical task such as patient care while in an impaired state of sleep inertia; and disturbances in cognitive functioning that are extensively linked to sleep disturbances such as sleep deprivation and sleep fragmentation, which will consequently impact both the effectiveness of paramedics and public safety.

To further the discussion on this issue, the Association has engaged in a professional fatigue impact study, *The Impacts of On-Call Hours on the Functioning of Paramedics*, that identifies both the psychological and physical health effects being placed upon Alberta's paramedics (see attached). The study outlines the effects of sleep inertia and cognitive function associated with fatigue that can be directly attributed to the current Core-Flex model. It is here that the Association does not understand why Paramedics, who provide emergency health care to people who need it in the most difficult moments, are not respected enough to allow them to be placed in work environments that protect their psychological and physical safety that every other Albertan is protected against within the legislation?

Today, we have identified three ambulance operators that have been granted a Ministerial Variance which we feel is unacceptable. This also means that all other operators, including AHS, that are using the Core-Flex model are being allowed to do so outside of the legislation. We can assume that some of these operators, including AHS, must be applying for their own Ministerial Variance. If so, we believe this should not be allowed to occur.

Without getting into the particulars of the attached research in this correspondence as it would be lengthy, however it is factual. We also know that there are documented cases within the last year where paramedics have fallen victim to these areas of concern listed within the research that are directly associated with Core-Flex.

The Association would like to work with you to achieve a meaningful result and to do the right thing and end Core-Flex in Alberta. Our ask is that we would like to be consulted, either as an individual group, or part of a working group or task force to do away with Core-Flex. We ask that no further Ministerial Variances are issued. We leave this with you for a response.

If you would like to discuss this matter further, or any other aspects of the Association, please contact me at dusty@albertaparamedics.ca or 780-904-3619.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Dusty Myshrall, ACP
President

Alberta Paramedic Association
 ALBERTA PARAMEDIC
ASSOCIATION

CC The Hon. Sarah Hoffman, Deputy Premier, Minister of Health