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## JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:  
City Administrator Deston Dishion, (760) 873-5863  
Inyo CAO Nate Greenberg, (760) 878-0292

## Short- and Long-Term Solutions to EMS Issues Sought

With the loss of advanced ambulance service in Northern Inyo County looming, the County of Inyo and City of Bishop are continuing to collaborate on various solutions.

Symons Emergency Services gave notice to the Inland Counties Emergency Medical Agency (ICEMA) in January that it plans to cease providing Advanced Life Support (ALS) ambulance services in the Exclusive Operating Area (EOA), which encompasses the greater Bishop area. Symons, which cited unsustainable financial losses as the reason for the company ceasing ALS operations in Bishop, will remain in operation until late April.

While appreciative of Symons' decades of service – dating back to 1989 – County and City officials are concerned about the loss of ALS response and are working to identify short-, mid-, and long-term solutions to avoid a gap in EMS service.

The agencies are also collaborating with ICEMA, which has the oversight and ultimate authority to approve EMS providers' operation in the area. Symons' current contract with ICEMA requires an ALS level of response in the Bishop area EOA, which ensures that a paramedic is on board the responding ambulance. Over the past year, the Bishop Fire Department has backed up Symons with additional ambulance service, mostly provided by volunteer Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) delivering Basic Life Support (BLS) services.

The County and City will focus in the short- and mid-term on continuity of service over the next year to year-and-a-half. Long-term efforts will include evaluating countywide EMS issues and needs, including within the City of Bishop, which will take some time to understand, develop strategies around, and implement. To that end, the City and County have become actively engaged in a third-party "gap analysis" study to ultimately help agencies identify where current program challenges exist and long-term solutions to those challenges.

EMS challenges are widespread across the nation, particularly in rural areas like Inyo County. A general shortage of individuals interested in becoming paramedics or EMTs, stringent and cost-prohibitive training requirements, lack of qualified candidates, and high turnover have all been cited as contributing to the nationwide shortage of EMS responders. Private ambulance companies like Symons are similarly plagued by shortages as well as low Medicare reimbursement rates that prevent them from recouping costs.

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