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David Swann, MD
MLA, CALGARY MOUNTAIN VIEW
CRITIC FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS, HUMAN SERVICES

January 24, 2012

Honourable Fred Horne
Minister of Health and Wellness
208 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB
T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Horne,

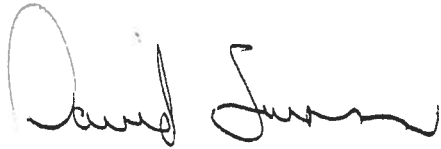
As an Albertan and a physician I am deeply disturbed by the growing number of EMS professionals who are expressing desperation at the decline in their life-saving service. I have discussed this with you privately and in the Legislature and believe there is an urgent need for action to address increased risk to individuals and the prospect of a major disaster going seriously bad without the EMS surge capacity essential in our modern society.

Not only are ambulance response times significantly longer (according to the EMS worker survey of November 2011) with greater risk to ill and injured Albertans, 72% of EMS staff experienced a one hour delay between one and four times on their last shift. Understandably this has led to profound discouragement of the staff and 2/3 of respondents indicated they were looking for other employment. Edmonton appears to have been more adversely impacted than Calgary, from discussions I've had with EMS staff in both cities.

There is also concern that appropriate measures are not being taken to permanently reduce the bottlenecks in emergency departments. These calls are often a matter of life and death, and the serious delays in response time and access to care are reminiscent of the 322 Emergency room patients documented by Dr. Paul Parks from a single month in 2007. It is imperative that you do not repeat the mistakes focusing on feel-good announcements of new staff hires and previously scheduled openings of ambulance stations. What we need is for you to listen to the concerns of front-line staff and to act swiftly and decisively.

EMS must have the appropriate number of vehicles and staff to drastically reduce the Red Alerts and long response times. Emergency wait times must be reduced so that ambulances are not lined up waiting outside to get in. This is not a time for half measures or quieting of discontent. Please make it a priority to ensure all Albertans can count on our emergency medical system and deploy the necessary resources to fully protect our population, and call an HQCA review on the subject so that we can start working on long-term solutions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Swann". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Swann".

Dr. David Swann, MLA
Calgary Mountain View
Official Opposition Critic for Health and Wellness, Human Services

C.c. Dr. Chris Eagle,
President and CEO
Alberta Health Services