

IAFF LEGISLATIVE FACT SHEET

ACCESS TO EMERGENCY MEDICATIONS

The IAFF supports the Protecting Patient Access to Emergency Medications Act.

BACKGROUND

Paramedics and other emergency medical personnel have long been authorized to provide controlled substances to patients in order to manage pain and improve health outcomes. Qualified emergency medical personnel traditionally operate under "standing orders" developed in accordance with state law by the medical director of each local emergency medical agency that describes in detail the dosages and conditions under which controlled substances may be administered.

Recently, the federal Drug Enforcement Administration expressed the view that the Controlled Substances Act forbids paramedics from administering controlled substances except under direct orders from a physician. This interpretation appears to be part of a broader effort by DEA to prevent opioid abuse by limiting access to prescription pain medications.

While well-intentioned, DEA's efforts could have dangerous consequences for emergency medical response. Requiring paramedics to communicate with a physician during every emergency medical call and for every patient risks delays, creates confusion, and compromises patient care.

To address this problem, legislation has been introduced in Congress to amend the Controlled Substances Act to expressly permit paramedics and other certified emergency medical practitioners to administer medications in certain circumstances. The legislation has been endorsed by a diverse group of organizations representing the entire range of emergency medical service providers.

On January 9, 2017, this bill, the Protecting Patient Access to Emergency Medications Act, passed the U.S. House of Representatives. The legislation must now be considered by the U.S. Senate.

CURRENT LEGISLATION

House: HR 304, the Protecting Patient Access to Emergency Medications Act
Sponsor: Rep. Richard Hudson (R-NC)

Summary: Amends the Controlled Substances Act to permit certified emergency medical providers to administer emergency medications under general standing orders.