

“The diligent efforts of rural Commissioners Court members across the state played a pivotal role in leading the Texas Legislature to pass House Bill 3000. This legislation allocates a substantial \$90 million to all 202 counties with populations below 68,750. However, since this is a newly established program, it’s not uncommon to revisit the bill’s language to address any unintended consequences and clarify interpretations of state agency rulemaking. We are optimistic about successfully passing clean-up legislation during the upcoming 90th Texas Legislative Session.” – CJCAT Legislative Director Rick Thompson

Resolution Spotlight

The Resolutions adopted by the members of the County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas (CJCAT) at the Annual Conference originate among members of Commissioners Courts and serve as the CJCAT Legislative Platform.

Related Legislation: H.B. 3000 by Rep. King/S.B. 1377 by Sen. Perry: Establishes the Rural Ambulance Services Grant Program aimed at supporting qualified ambulance service providers in rural counties under a population of 68,750.

Funding for Rural Ambulance Service County Judge or Commissioner → CJCAT → Legislature

An ambulance desert is defined as an area in which people are more than 25 minutes from an ambulance station.

According to a national study and related research report, “Geographic Disparities in the Provision of Ambulance Services,” 94.9 percent of Texas counties include an ambulance desert. The data, released in May 2023, also indicated that Texas has the third-highest number of people living in ambulance deserts.

County Impact

“Ambulance services in rural areas have the largest area to cover for the fewest people with the least tax revenue,” stated Clay County Judge Mike Campbell.

Clay County covers 1,117 square miles and has 10,218 residents. The population density per square mile is 9.38. Ambulances are stationed in Henrietta, which is in the center of the county.

Clay County is approximately 50 miles from the north to the south boundary and 27 miles from east to west.

“That means an ambulance call could take 40 minutes to respond to an accident or medical emergency,” Campbell explained. “If we only funded one crew, that ambulance would be out of service, and it would be necessary to request mutual assistance from neighboring counties.”

Clay County currently funds two full-time crews from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., but only one ambulance crew from 10:00 p.m. to 10:00 a.m.

“Our latest financial report shows that funding two full-time crews will cost us over \$1,000,000,” Campbell reported.

Approximately 10 percent of Clay County ambulance calls involve accidents on U.S. Highways 287 and 82 and State Highways 148 and 79 and often impact non-Clay County residents.

State funding is needed to provide ambulance services to all Texans who travel through rural areas, Campbell emphasized.

“It is reasonable to think that our urban neighbors would be willing to assist with funding so that an ambulance and emergency room service would be available in the event of an accident or medical emergency in a rural area,” Campbell elaborated.

Members of Commissioners Courts worked with the CJCAT to develop the following resolution:

Support for Statewide Funding for Rural Ambulance Service

WHEREAS, in many rural communities in Texas the EMS responders might be the only health care provider in the community; and

WHEREAS, Texas has experienced many rural hospital closures, and once a rural hospital closes, the local EMS agency is often the only remaining emergency health care provider; and

WHEREAS, EMS is not designated as a mandatory service for state or local governments; however, many rural counties attempt to manage the development, funding, and maintenance of EMS with declining resources; and

WHEREAS, staffing shortages, declining insurance reimbursements, uninsured patients, expanding areas to provide service, and acquiring updated equipment are issues that amplify the challenges of providing rural EMS; and

WHEREAS, according to a nationwide study on access to timely ambulance service, Texas ranks near the top in terms of rural residents living in ambulance deserts, creating excessively lengthy response times; and

WHEREAS, volunteer services are phasing out with the aging population of volunteers while the younger population in the community commutes to distant employment or moves to urban areas leaving few replacements; and

WHEREAS, urban residents and their families depend upon rural EMS when traveling throughout Texas, making access a statewide issue;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas and its current member counties hereby support and favor the passage of legislation to provide statewide funding to support and enhance rural EMS for all Texans.