



***POLK COUNTY FIRE DISTRICT NO.1***

1800 Monmouth St., Independence, OR 97351

Phone: 503-838-1510 Fax: 503-838-1235

Ben Stange, Fire Chief

2/04/2021

Central Fire Station  
Station #90  
1800 Monmouth St  
Independence

Airlie  
Station #80  
14775 Airlie Rd  
Monmouth

Pedee  
Station #70  
12485 Kings Valley  
Monmouth

Buena Vista  
Station #40  
11350 Church St  
Independence

TO: THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

**RE: HB 2894**

Chair Evans, and Members of the Committee,

Throughout this pandemic, one of the largest challenges to emergency responders has been not just to keep the community safe, but to keep our emergency responders safe. In the early stages of this state of emergency, we were told to conserve PPE but that we should simultaneously treat everyone as if they are positive for COVID-19. We were provided guidance from the OHA and the CDC regarding everything from use of PPE to decontamination of equipment and minimizing number of personnel responding on confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients. One of the top concerns that arose was the inability of emergency responders to be provided any sort of warning that a facility they were entering had confirmed cases.

The concern over not being provided this information was universal among responders. For months we worked through dispatch to create new questioning. Some agencies even subscribed to programs that cost tens of thousands of dollars so that their citizens could self report.

In one specific case from our community, a staff member of a local care facility informed one of our paramedics that they had nine employees who had tested positive for COVID. This informal notification came after our personnel had been in and out of the facility multiple times in the course of a couple days. Thankfully, it happened far enough into the pandemic that we were equipped with appropriate systems and PPE. However, the same day we were made aware, local law enforcement responded to assist on a call at the location but were unaware of the increased risk.

It is important to highlight the fact that our dispatchers already have all kinds of information on file. We have warnings about safety hazards to responders. We have gate code numbers and key locations. This information is provided when someone at the location calls 911 at which point the address is flagged and the dispatcher communicates the information to responders. This information is to better serve the public, and in some instances to keep our personnel safe.

I have no doubt that those in public health and emergency management care for the safety of our emergency responders. I believe that most want first responders to have this information. The fear seems to be concerning the release of health data, even a release that does not include a patient's name.

*“Serving Because We Care”*



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Eventually, I'm proud to say that we got over this hurdle in this instance through a makeshift system of cooperation. My fear is that by the time we have another pandemic, one that may be even more contagious or more deadly, many of us who spent months trying to create work-arounds will no longer be around to try to pull this patchwork together again. It makes sense to have a single, common, clear process that can be deployed with the urgency needed in these instances.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ben Stange". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ben" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Stange".

Ben Stange, Fire Chief  
Polk County Fire District No.1