



EMS Section of The International Association of Fire Chiefs

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Degree Requirement for Paramedics: FAQs

Prepared by the IAFC EMS Section Board of Directors, November 2018

What impact would requiring an associate degree for entry level paramedics have in the US?

Requiring a degree would mean that only colleges or universities could run paramedic education programs. Presently, that would force the closure of **133** programs:

- 19 Fire-based programs
- 6 City or County EMS run programs
- 1 Federal paramedic program
- 65 Hospital operated programs
- 42 Consortium run programs

Closing what amounts to 21% of the current existing paramedic programs in the U.S. would make paramedic education harder to access in many locations, and non-existent in some. The added time needed to complete additional college degree coursework would also delay the flow of students into the work force. The current paramedic shortage would likely increase.

Is IAFC opposing higher education?

The IAFC is not opposing higher education. In fact, we support higher education for firefighters and EMS providers as a career advancement tool. The proposal to require a degree to graduate from a paramedic program by 2025 would result in closing multiple fire service, military and commercial EMS service paramedic programs and critically reduce the fire service work force. It should be noted that all nineteen fire service programs are currently accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) and held to the same standards as college degree programs. There is, in fact, a current pathway for EVERY paramedic student to obtain college credit, even in schools that are not colleges or universities. Each accredited paramedic program must have either a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or an articulation agreement with a college to provide college credit to any student who wishes to obtain it for the successful completion of a paramedic program.

What benefits have Kansas and Oregon seen from requiring associate degrees for paramedic licensure?

Both states now have limited access to paramedic training: Kansas has only seven programs and there are only nine in Oregon. Paramedic wages in Kansas and Oregon are no different from neighboring states without requirements for college degrees.

Is it realistic to compare paramedics to other allied health professions such as nursing?

No. The training and reimbursement for paramedic services is completely different from other allied health professions. Reimbursement for EMS services is limited to transport of patients to a hospital. Nursing services and other allied health providers are reimbursed for the entire spectrum of care provided.

EMS makes extensive use of volunteer providers. There is no other health profession routinely uses volunteer providers in any capacity. It is unlikely that the many small, rural communities who rely on volunteer paramedic providers would be able to continue to recruit and retain paramedics if a degree were required for entry level practice. In addition, many career fire services may not be able to expend the time and resources required to send their personnel to college education programs

Also unique to the fire service, both career and volunteer, is the fact that many paramedics are cross-trained as firefighters. Whereas other allied health professions serve a single role, firefighter/paramedics serve multiple roles, maximizing their value to the communities they serve.

Why does the fire service desire to continue paramedic training programs?

Fire Departments with established, accredited paramedic training programs can train personnel efficiently, cost effectively and on schedules that meet the needs of the department. Personnel can be trained to the paramedic level much more rapidly than the two years' minimum required for an Associate's Degree. This training has been demonstrated as equivalent to other, more traditional, accredited paramedic programs. Without fire department based paramedic training programs, the fire service would become dependent on academic calendars that would substantially (and likely prohibitively) increase costs to taxpayers. Where paramedic licensure is a fire department employment prerequisite, many prospective candidates would be precluded from completing paramedic training because of the increased costs of the obtaining a degree.