

The Future of the Emergent Services in Kankakee County

Currently, fire districts in Kankakee County are set up in size and location to meet the needs of their respective communities according to its size, demands and tax base. This independence (local control & scale) creates improved and immediate accountability from officials as its their community. With independence comes autonomy and simplicity. Autonomy keeps the focus on the mission statement and simplicity allows for taxes and costs to remain lower. A lack of understanding in how our county's emergent services operate suggest apparently easy solutions will solve our problems. As a result, a vacuum is created and those seeking power and control might develop solutions that fail to meet our long-term goals & objectives. A better understanding is needed by all interested parties if we are to develop the best possible solution.

The Current State of Our Emergent Services

Fire Districts provide and perform more services than they did 20 years ago. This is a fact and not recognized often by constituents. In addition to their understood roles (basic/advanced life support & transport, Haz-mat response, water rescue, wildland fires, technical rescue, fire investigation, and motor vehicle accidents) they have added the roles of public education, pre-planning, code enforcement, car seat installs, cpr instruction and numerous other responsibilities that the community has requested. The requests for more service are not matched with an increase in revenue. And now, the state of Illinois is mandating that we provide mental health responses without any revenue source, further complicating the situation.

Local officials and taxpayers call for decreased taxes, but never decreased service. In 2021, there were approximately 32,000 calls for service in Kankakee County. This represents a 31% increase since 2011. If we responded to fewer calls, we would have a decreased need for services, which in turn would lead to lower costs.

Why does our call volume increase each year? As our population ages, our elderly residents experience many additional health issues. Societal shifts have leaned towards being less self-reliant and more dependent on government services. The public drives with less concern for others by utilizing cell phones, driving faster than speed limits & not exercising courtesy resulting in more motor vehicle accidents. Sadly, the public is less healthy (physically and mentally) which again leads to health emergencies & mental health calls too.

Overall, as a public we dislike advice to follow codes or procedures which were created to prevent injury and death, so often we choose to ignore them. We hear the common refrain "I know what I'm doing" or "I can design safety into the project," but we cannot change people and their behavior. Codes are developed after a catastrophe occurred, and we resolve to prevent it from happening again. We should learn from the past, but our memories are short as

we feel we are smarter than in the past. People are people and we will repeat our mistakes contributing to the difficulty in controlling our costs.

What is the correct answer? It is difficult to identify. However, before we find the correct answer, we need to educate our public and our government officials about:

1. What we do?
2. Understanding our day – the calls, preparation, training, etc...
3. Why it takes so many firefighters and/or equipment to combat a fire or a motor vehicle accident?
4. What is “Slack” in the fire service and why it is important?

The Perceived “Low Hanging Fruit”

The publics and the elected officials’ views are often not correct, nor realistic. Many of the often-recited comments toward consolidation appear to be easy and/or is low hanging fruit:

- You have too many tower ladders. Look what we can save?
- You should just get rid of all the chiefs.
- Firefighters are always just sitting around.
- We should centralize the firehouses.
- Consolidation will save us money.
- Consolidation will help with recruitment.

Too many ladders – There are five ladder trucks in Kankakee County, but it is based on the buildings and the needs of their respective districts. And we rely on our neighbors to respond with theirs as our staffing will utilize the engines first for fire suppression. We do not have enough staffing to get all the ladders in route if needed. And most of the ladders in our county are over 20 years old, so there is not much of a savings if we get rid of them. However, better cooperation among the agencies to share a purchase or resource the next time would be beneficial.

Get rid of the chiefs – Most of the fire chiefs are also firefighters & paramedics, thus responders. Getting rid of responders lessens the overall availability of responders in Kankakee County. There are only several full-time chiefs in Kankakee County, so most are paid on call (thus not very well compensated). You will still need supervision & management, so you just promote full-time firefighter(s) to fill the position which will cost you more money! Regarding full-time chiefs, any county teams (Haz Mat, TRT, Fire Investigation, Inspectors) in which they serve is not compensable whereas a full time or poc firefighter would be paid (time & a half). This includes the boards in the county in which the full-time chiefs may serve too. In addition, they perform the administrative functions of the district/department along with their fire/Ems/rescue, public education, inspections and other multiple roles.

Firefighters are always just sitting around – Spending a 24-hour shift in a Kankakee County firehouse will change this viewpoint. Sitting around is really “slack” which involves availability and redundancy.

Availability – availability is ensuring we are ready to respond to the next call at a moment’s notice.

Redundancy – is having the resources in place to quickly respond to the next emergency.

Both terms involve being prepared with the proper equipment and necessary training. We have heard the comment “the firefighters are just hanging around.” This is a good thing as it means we are available for your emergency. And with the demands of preparation (mandated training, maintaining proficiency & ensuring the equipment is ready) and on-going calls, they do not just hang around much anymore. In business, availability represents under-utilized resources and would be adjusted to be maximized as they would seek out the identified opportunity. A business has hours of operation, ours is 24/7. And we must be able to respond to an emergency that we do not know about until the emergency call is made to 911. A business has planned production. If the public would schedule their emergencies, it would make our ability to respond more efficient.

Availability is also determined by the distant to respond and the distance to the hospital. The further away the emergency from the fire station, the longer it takes for the resources to get back into service after the calls completed. It costs more money when we place stations, equipment and firefighters equally across an area. And in a less densely populated area, there probably would not be enough tax revenue to cover the costs. A business would consolidate locations and equipment, but in doing this would create a longer response. In addition, when we are 20-25 minutes away from a hospital, it takes the ambulance crew longer to complete the call. So additional resources are needed to meet the demand. It would be more efficient if we were 5 minutes from the hospital. A call for us is not the same as a call for a fire district in closer proximity to the hospital.

Availability is also affected by our neighboring districts/departments staffing levels, call volume and budgets. Our system has worked well as one helps the other when one is busy, it is hoped we are not all busy at the same time. This reciprocation allows us to operate in a smaller capacity vs. operating at the projected maximum community service need.

Redundancy provides us with the ability to handle more than one call at a time. When we run one call, 36% of the time we will run another and another. This has occurred up to 9 calls at a time, but many times it is 2, 3 or 4 (or more) calls in a row. We staff three ambulances, so we can handle three in a row, if we are not responding to an mva, structure fire or other manpower intensive incidents. When we do not have the necessary staffing & equipment to handle the requested volume, we ask our neighbors for assistance. And when they incur an increased service demand, we reciprocate by helping them too. This practice works as our peak

demands do not usually occur at the same time. Without this redundancy, we would need 9 ambulances and 54 paramedics to meet that call volume demand vs. the 3 ambulances we do operate and 24 paramedics that we employ now. If we lose this redundancy, the wait times for the next available ambulance may be 30-45 minutes. Without redundancy, we will be forced to triage the 911 calls and respond as the resources become available.

We must remember that redundancy is the enemy of efficiency in the business world, and it is what cost cutting & consolidation efforts focus on to justify the savings. It may be a savings, but is it worth the cost? Many medical emergencies require (such as CVA's and traumas (falls, MVA's)) require quick responses. Brain injury occurs within 5 minutes of reduced or no oxygen. The first 911 caller receives the service they expected, but what about caller #2, #3, etc.... And is the Fire District fulfilling their mission at this point?

Centralize the firehouses – Recent UL studies demonstrate fires are hotter, faster, and more intense than 30 years ago, as fire doubles in size every 17 seconds. 30 years ago, occupants had 17 minutes to escape a house fire. Today, it's 3 to 4 minutes (Russert Davis 2016). Location is response time and response time is life, in both fire/rescue response and EMS. Consolidation will close fire-stations as the greatest cost savings is found in personnel reduction. A one-time savings may be enjoyed by not purchasing new equipment and by reducing the existing equipment available. However, these actions will result in a reduction of service.

Consolidation will save us money – Most of the firefighters and officers in Kankakee County are paid on call. This means they are not full-time and only get paid when they respond. They do not earn benefits (insurance- health, life, dental) nor a pension. When you consolidate, you will lose many of the paid-on call firefighters who serve their local community and will be forced to replace them with full-time and thus expensive union firefighters who will earn better pay, benefits & a great pension.

Consolidation will help with recruitment – It will not as the fire service is the midst of a nationwide shortage. Pay is the answer to recruitment which will lead to higher costs and higher taxes. We need to support our local systems which are the most efficient in managing personnel costs.

The most sustainable cost savings, other than ask the public to not rely on the 911 system so much, is to standardize the fire apparatus and equipment purchases. This follows the Southwest Airlines business model as it seeks cost savings through easier repairs (technicians are trained on one type of plane and parts are only needed for one type of plane). But this contradicts the rules for low-cost bidding, which in the long run raises the overall operational costs at the possibility of short term (if any) savings. And the public thinks joint purchasing will save money, but this too is a fallacy as the competitive market has created a narrow profit margin for gear and equipment. A diligent manager will obtain a greater savings through negotiating and seeking quality equipment, than a manager who is always about price. The price story is an easy sell and not usually true.

The Consolidation Discussion & Seeking A Balance

Before you consider an apparent solution, you must understand the complexity of the problem. Otherwise, the proposed solution will create a situation which is much worse. There have been three communities that have been asked by their fire districts for additional funding (referendums) to keep up with demand. They have all failed and failed several times. Why? – their constituents do not want to pay more taxes. Then we need to ask them to decrease their demand for services, but we do not. So, what are the options?

1. Support the current system, working together to create functional consolidation/cooperation/sharing services.
2. Consolidate into a county-wide fire district.
3. Specific cases where some districts/departments consolidate would be beneficial.
4. The local communities combine to provide fire/rescue services and contract with private systems (Riverside, Ascension, out of county service) to provide ems. We may also consider keeping the fire districts individual and allowing for the ems to be contracted. We will call this the “Hybrid” model.

Consolidation is not a sustainable goal. It leads to a reduction in service, an inability to serve, a loss in local adaptability to meet the specific local needs and less local leadership. The savings comes in removing “slack” in system. Slack is an available but under-utilized resources and is viewed as inefficiency. But in a 911 system, it represents the next available unit to handle the next unscheduled event that will occur. We would like to think that 911 calls are schedule and occur one at a time. But this is not the case, as they are always unscheduled and arrive in bunches.

Slack is eliminated as a cost savings, but it is still needed to handle the 911 demands of the community. In Kankakee County, the fire-based ems districts provide the slack in the county as the private ems services operate in a business (profit) environment. They are spaced for efficiency and move around seeking their best use, which is to be busy with calls (thus making money). The first 911 caller gets the available resource; the next 911 caller must wait for another unit to move from another distant location. Time is life, in both fires and ems emergencies. Slack is the enemy of efficiency but is necessary for an effective 911 system.

What we need is balance

Once the benefit of the initial consolidation (reduction) is enjoyed (if there is one), the benefit is gone, and the service reduction is on-going. We see corporate consolidations occur frequently, so we feel it will work for us as taxpayers. But there are also many that failed, such as Kraft, Kmart, Sears, etc... We may review the GE & Siemens situations to find answers regarding this topic. Both corporations grew into conglomerates, but now want to split as they

are worth more individually than that as a large group. Do we want a single aircraft carrier or a fleet of smaller, faster ships? The answer is always changing.

Consolidation will make it more difficult to manage the culture as well as the organizational parts. It becomes more expensive, less responsive, greater union control, less flexible, and less transparent. When you create something bigger, you inherently make it slower. There will be more support layers, more spread out for efficiency (leading to less redundancy & slower response times), priorities will change and be all for one & one for all (rather than local) and individual opinions & viewpoints will mean less as there will be many to consider. Thus, the smaller communities will have less influence. Local fire districts in Kankakee County currently provide a better representation, lower cost structure & accountability of local preferences & services required by their respective communities rather than what can be provided by a county-wide district.

According to Grubb & Lamb (2000) only about 20% of consolidations rarely succeed. They fail to deliver what was promised. **There must be a burden of proof any good is likely to come of it!**

McKinsey & Co. found nearly 80% of all mergers do not recover the cost involved in a merger. And half lead to either reduced profits or productivity or in some cases both (Fisher, 1994). Consolidation for financial results alone will result in less service. Labor is the largest constant cost for a fire district. Thus, lower the number of firefighters/paramedics available will lower the service that can be provided too. There is no way to mitigate this fact.

What questions should we ask to get the needed information to answer the question.

1. How will consolidation effect the quality & delivery of service? This would include the overall service model, station locations, staffing, apparatus, available funding from the local communities).
2. What will consolidation cost? What is the true/demonstratable savings? Is it a short-term savings or a long-term savings?
3. If a county-wide district is formed, what will the ability to meet NFPA 1710 & 1221? (Response times & staffing)
4. How to merge the pension funds/obligations? As all are funded at various levels – Kankakee 16%, Manteno 97%). Each would have to provide 100% funding prior to consolidation, otherwise the obligation is shared & not fair).

5. Review the proposed consolidation plan & provide feedback. Boston Consulting Group states 80% do not do consolidation planning & 0% do not set financial goals. The plan must have strategic plan & objectives (financial & operational). The plan must be detailed, otherwise it is a plan for disaster- “we will worry about it later.” And we must evaluate the goals vs. The proposed outcomes. The need to consolidate should be driven by needed increase to staffing & service, not financial purposes.
6. What are the advantages & disadvantages to service quality & delivery that may be realized by consolidation? Regarding:
 - Staffing
 - Equipment
 - Stations
 - Education
 - Prevention
 - Grant Writing
 - Training
 - Admin Support
7. What lessons can be learned from the successes and the failures of other consolidation efforts? Consider all governmental, non-profit & business consolidations.
8. What is the consolidation contingency plan? What will we do if it does not work as planned?
9. How do we achieve a common real estate tax, so costs are allocated equally? And we must realize that equal taxes will not be equal service as larger areas can afford and will require more service.
10. How do we achieve pay equalization in the consolidated effort? Areas to consider include:
 - Full-time, poc pay, part-time, emt-b's, paramedics
 - Benefits
 - CBA's
 - Seniority
 - Pensions
 - Org Chart
11. Will need to adopt county-wide building & life safety codes. This will mean all the villages & cities in Kankakee County will need to agree to adopt and enforce a common

code, along with common ordinances. Otherwise, it will be quite confusing to enact & enforce multiple codes.

12. What about the current support system of auto-aid & mutual-aid which is the backbone of our fire system? Consolidation will impede the benefits gained from this reciprocal system.

13. Why can't you run a fire department/district like a business?

In the administrative functions, it is run like a business as we maximize efficiencies, minimize expenses, seek additional sources of revenue and utilize data to make informed decisions. But operationally, this is more difficult. Here are a few examples:

- A. Emergencies can't be scheduled – we receive numerous emergent calls in a close time frame which deplete our resources for the next call. It's easier when 911 calls are one at a time, but many times this is not the case. If the public could schedule emergencies, then we could better prepare for the demands in the most efficient method possible. It is common during each day for 2 or 3 of our ambulances and 6 of our paramedic/firefighters to be on calls and not available for the next call. One 911 call does not wait for the next call. The 911 calls tend to arrive in bunches. So how do you plan for the efficient use of resources when you don't know what is needed at what time of the day? We utilize our mutual aid (neighboring districts/departments) for redundancy, with the hope they are not busy at the same time. This creates a better utilization of resources while lowering the costs necessary to staff at the needed service level. And we reciprocate to make it work for all of us. When others can't reciprocate, the system is not efficient. With reduced staffing, busier call volumes and underbudgeted districts/departments, this is becoming a growing problem.

- B. We must respond to a broad category of incidents, not just the ones that have revenue streams attached. Business would focus on optimization and delete the non-performing/non-optimal items. When you call 911, anything not an initial crime, traffic issue or business check mostly gets a fire response. Examples of a fire response – building fire, vehicle fire, field fire, motor vehicle accident, gas leak, carbon monoxide poisoning, structural collapse rescue, machinery entrapment.... Or ems call such as cardiac arrest, difficulty breathing, feeling ill, stroke, diabetic emergency, allergic reaction and the list goes on. Therefore, we train every day!

C. Availability – availability is ensuring we are ready to respond to the next call at a moment’s notice.

Redundancy – is having the resources in place to quickly respond to the next emergency.

This point was discussed earlier.

D. Proximity – “Time is Life”

Placing resources in a central location sounds great from an expense perspective, but if your ambulance and/or fire engine is 20 minutes away, it’s a long way away when you want a quick response. Especially when tissue death can occur within 5 minutes of a heart attack or not breathing, or when a fire doubles in size every 17 seconds with modern materials. We have placed our resources in 2 locations, which maximizes our ability to respond quickly to most of our residents & businesses within our 96.3 square mile district.

Proximity, redundancy, and availability are key to optimizing an emergency response, this is counter to corporate resource efficiency.

E. Efficiencies- we seek efficiencies within our scope.:

- a. Responses -Auto aid, mutual aid, MABAS, Haz Mat Team, Fire Investigation Team, CART Team, TRT Team.
- b. Sharing of Resources – testing equipment, instructors, training-academy, computer systems.
- c. Cooperating in equipment utilization & purchasing.
- d. Protecting 96.3 sq. miles with full-time staffing.
- e. Utilizing technology to improve emergent response, patient care and training.
- f. Cross training staff to handle fire inspections, public education and fire prevention activities.

We help our neighboring communities when they are busy and they reciprocate when we are busy, but many times when one fire district/ department is busy so are the others. This may mean the nearest ambulance or fire truck may be up to 30 minutes away! It is not always as simple as it appears.

F. We respond to non-emergency calls where there is no funding available, and no one else will do it or is not available to do it – lift assists, rescue a pet... Businesses look for ways to maximize revenue and decrease costs, they would not take on these tasks. We provide services when it does not make a business sense to provide the service. We provide fire, rescue & ems services for the Common Good of all, not just a targeted segment of the community. The 911 needs and/or

demands of our community are beginning to stress our ability to provide the services being requested. The funding provided by real estate taxes & fees allocated for those services are not keeping pace with the community's demand for services. And no one wants to pay more – the taxpayer (real estate taxes, fees), the government (Medicare & Medicaid, inadequate social services), the insurance companies (private medical & auto insurance). If it was looked at as a business, they would abandon the business. To us, this is not an option.

- G. We do not balance bill our residents for ambulance calls. This means that we don't ask our residents to pay the remainder of the ambulance invoice that is not covered by their insurance. If a neighboring district/department or a private/hospital ambulance responds, you may be asked to pay the remainder owing. This is a big financial benefit for the residents of our community as we plan to best meet the needs to the community through proper staffing, equipment levels and revenue/cost management.

To discuss & develop sustainable solutions, we must understand the mission of our fire district and the daily demands placed on us to achieve the mission for our community. In 2021., the emergent responses for Kankakee County equated to approximately 32,000 incidents. Although we have provided several examples of why we perform the way we do, it is not all encompassing. The needs of all in Kankakee County need to be considered in seeking the best solution. Let's consider the possible solutions:

Support the current system

Currently, the finances, apparatus & staffing needs are determined by the local fire district boards to meet the local needs. Consolidation will change this model as the population centers will receive greater attention & services. A community chooses its funding level & service level based on the amount currently provided through the real estate taxes. This local determination goes away with consolidation.

Some consolidation efforts should be investigated as it may be beneficial due to resources (staffing, equipment & money) becoming scarce. Consolidation must be viewed as a solution to achieving our objective of improving our fire/ems service at the best cost for our communities with a thorough understanding, consideration of the unintended consequences and without the malice of power and control. There are efficiencies we should explore and can be develop by working together with Auto Aid responses, boundary responses and some functional consolidation. But the efficiencies the public perceive to be game changers (eliminating apparatus or chiefs) will not provide a long term nor significant cost savings. The only real savings is found in a reduction of labor which will result in closed stations & reduced service availability for our communities (especially those in the rural areas).

Consolidation will force the local politicians to increase taxes/funding to pay for a consolidated district. And in our current climate, this act would be highly unlikely.

Projected cost: \$23,000,000.00 (approx. in 2022 dollars) this is the current situation with costs, real estate proceeds and ambulance revenues collected in by the fire districts/departments Kankakee County.

Consolidation

Consolidation will lead to increased personnel costs as most of the firefighters in Kankakee County are paid on call and many are not paramedics. So many full-time firefighters/paramedics will need to be hired with a nationwide shortage already in full force. In the cost example, 10 stations would close. There are 24 stations now, the model includes based on the population allocation.

Assumptions:

- Full-time firefighters working 24 hr. shifts – on 24/ off 48
- Riverside ambulance continues to serve the communities they now serve, but that represents a loss of income for those communities & Riverside Ambulance will continue to balance bill residents. Most fire districts ems do not balance bill (which means the resident does not pay the remainder (balance) of the bill after what insurance/medicare/Medicaid does not cover/pay)
- K3, Brad, Bour, AP & Mant receive ambulance revenue to support operations & do not balance bill residents.
- All pension obligations are covered by the respective municipalities prior to consolidation.
- There are no capital contributions calculated in these cost assumptions. They will be needed to support on-going operations.

To make consolidation work, we will need to accomplish the following:

1. Trust
2. Equal Participation – create a task force as participation cannot be forced or mandated
3. Respect the distinct cultures, missions, & traditions
 - a. Identify & respect the differences
 - b. Integrate the differences, do not ignore them
 - c. Morale will be affected by loss of control/voice
 - d. Organizational culture & ability to adapt to change will be needed
4. Communication – open, clear & transparent
5. Must create & follow a detailed plan! - involves financial, managerial, operational, legal, rebranding, etc...

6. Establishment of controls to ensure proper representation & yet large enough to be effective.
7. Build county-wide relationships & commitments (involvement = value = success)
8. Engagement of the communities on how they feel about emergency services they receive in terms of fire, rescue & ems.

Projected costs: \$34,537,919.00 (in 2022 dollars) (assuming Riverside Ambulance continues to provide EMS services at no cost/minimal cost to Momence, & limited cost to Otto, St. Anne, K3 Twp & Herscher. Closing 10 stations assumes RMC will continue currently operating as is and firefighter/emt B's & P's are available for hire. In addition, we hope their salaries are adequate due to the nationwide shortage and the pay levels of the Chicagoland area. The new contracts in the Chicagoland area are higher is salary & cost and are not affordable for our county. For a reference to an active consolidated (county) fire district, please view www.unifiedfire.org website for budget, member fees/allocation and policies.

Specific cases where some districts/departments consolidation would be beneficial

There are cases in the county where consolidation would be beneficial. There are contiguous districts/departments where a district can respond quicker due to a fire station located closer to the area served by the other district/department. Some overlap may be also enjoyed in administrative functions creating a small cost savings for both agencies. The goal would be to improve service and gain some cost savings for both agencies. But large, sustainable savings would prove illusionary once the reality of the situation progress. This illusionary savings is created by not fully understanding the fire/ems response model as well as the fire/ems business realities involved in ensuring the 911 calls are handled appropriately. Some of the challenges would include equalizing the cost/benefit (tax rate & eav/services provided) to the taxpayers involved, blending district/department cultures, and ensuring the needs of the involved communities are met with adequate resources. In our current employment climate and the national paramedic shortage, consolidation may occur simply due to a lack of available resources (paramedics).

The projected costs/benefits would be determined as each case is researched. This alternative would allow for local determination in assessing the merits of a consolidation.

Hybrid

In this model, the County would separate Fire/Rescue & EMS. It would be assumed a private EMS (possibly Riverside Ambulance) would cover the EMS with the EMS Levy currently provided by RE Taxes and the ambulance billing from the calls. This would be a business model and thus efficiency would be the goal. And efficiency will mean a decrease in ambulance availability and service. This model would not lower the cost to the businesses and residents of the county but would allow the fire districts to decrease their dependence on personnel costs by shifting it to the privatization side. And it would provide a better cost allocation as the fees would be borne by the users of the services. This will provide a reduction of the increases of the cost of providing the services to the overall public in the future. But the public that utilizes the Ems (usually the seniors) will pay more.

Projected costs: undetermined at this time, as the ems would be bid, costs will be allocated differently, cba considerations negotiated and local public opinion measured. But the costs will not be less than the current system. Some consolidation of the fire districts may be encouraged. This may be necessary due to the evaporating availability of Paid on Call/ Volunteer Firefighters. Combining the fire districts in Kankakee County would raise the labor costs exponentially, as well as reduce the services available.

What is the future for emergency services in Kankakee County?

The future will provide challenges, but they can be overcome by working together and using knowledge & data to maximize our resources. We must guard against the so-called experts who purport to know everything but are spewing generalized understanding, perceived ideas or possess a bias (power, control, labor, employment) with no real basis for truth. Perception is reality to many, but it will not lead to a better serving and more cost-effective emergency service in Kankakee County.

Based on the information provided from this report, it is my recommendation that we work together to continue to support the current system and cooperate to seek efficiencies in sharing services. This model/solution is difficult (cooperation) but must be encouraged and supported to provide the greatest level of service to our communities for the funding allocated. This model would bring the greatest cost/benefit to our communities now and in the future. Cooperation, planning & support are the keys to operating success in our service.

The full consolidation alternative & the hybrid alternative will both diminish emergent services and increase the cost to the taxpayers of Kankakee County. The local district/department determination consideration model should be explored when necessary and appropriate. This will be on a case-by-case basis, rather than on a generalized basis which will create a more equitable solution for the communities involved. The current nationwide staffing crisis, along with inflationary factors will also be a challenge to our staffing & cost models in the future. These pressures will further erode our ability to provide appropriate emergency services in Kankakee County, but we must work together to best serve our communities. **“We are only as good as we all are!”**

