

**Final Report**

**Milam County Medical Task Force**

**December 14, 2021**

On April 26, 2021, Milam County Commissioners Court created and appointed the Milam County Medical Task Force to evaluate and make recommendations regarding three primary medical issues within the county.

1. The economic feasibility of after-hours and/or urgent care in Milam County.
2. The economic feasibility of adding another ground ambulance to the existing AMR and PHI ambulance services in Milam County.
3. The feasibility of using the existing Rockdale Hospital and/or medical clinic for medical or other services.

### **MILAM COUNTY MEDICAL TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY**

- It is not economically feasible to pursue after hours and/or urgent care in Milam County.
- With the establishment of an Emergency Services District (ESD), it is economically feasible to pursue improvements to the existing AMR ground ambulance services and PHI ambulance services in Milam County.
- It is not feasible to use the existing Rockdale Hospital and/or medical clinic for medical or other services.

- Form a committee to petition for the 100 signatures required for the creation of the ESD. Then present the petition to the county requesting a position on the November 2022 ballot to establish an Emergency Service District at a ten cent per \$100 valuation.
- Appoint an interim ESD board to promote the vote and develop a plan for managing the emergency medical services.
- Once established, begin to work on increasing the number of ambulances in the county and updating equipment for PHI.
- The ESD Board would work continuously to improve the status of emergency medical services in our county, striving to bring additional medical services into the county as the county grows.

## Task Force Members

This task force is composed of 8 citizens of Milam County appointed by the County Commissioners. Those appointed include Collier Perry, Nathan Fuchs, Kain Dodd, Pastor R. L. Johnson, Troy Zinn, Robert Kirkpatrick, Courtney Paulsen, and John Egger. These appointments offered representation from across the county with varying knowledge from the medical field, emergency services, rural healthcare, and the business industry.

Chairman, **Collier Perry**, a long-time Rockdale businessman, has been at the helm of the task force. Mr. Perry moved to Rockdale in 1952 as a child, graduated from Rockdale High School, and received his Engineering degree from Texas Tech University. He and his wife, Peggy, returned to Rockdale and founded Perry & Perry Builders.

**Nathan Fuchs** is from Cameron, he graduated from C.H. Yoe High School and Texas A&M University. He currently works as hatchery manager for Ideal Poultry and serves as a City Council member for the City of Cameron. He and his wife Ashley have 2 children and enjoy raising them in Cameron.

**Kain Dodd**, Fire Chief of Milano Volunteer Fire Department, has been able to provide insight into the medical issues of the county from a first responder's point

of view. Chief Dodd joined Milano VFD in 2014 and has taken every opportunity over the past 7 years to expand his knowledge of the fire service and emergency pre-hospital healthcare.

**Pastor R.L. Johnson, Sr.** Pastor of Rising Star Baptist Church in Rockdale, brings years of experience, innovation, and vision to the table. Pastor Johnson earned degrees from Texas State Technical College, Austin Graduate School of Theology, and The Institute for Teaching God's Word Theological Seminary.

**Troy Zinn** holds a degree in Accounting from Kansas State University and has 30 years experience as a CFO and controller. He offers insight from the financial side of healthcare, with 14 years of experience in healthcare, serving as a hospital system administrator/ COO, CIO, CFO, and controller. He has raised his three children here in Rockdale with his wife, Deana. He has been actively involved in the Rockdale community and has been a member of the Rockdale ISD Board for 10 years.

**Robert Kirkpatrick** currently serves as the Executive Director of the Milam County Health Department. Kirkpatrick received a Bachelor of Science in Industrial Engineering Technology from Texas A&M Commerce and a Master of Science in Project Management from St. Edward's University. He has over 14 years of service

in public health, primarily in public health emergency preparedness at the local, regional, and state level.

**Courtney Paulsen** APRN, FNP-C, is a family nurse practitioner and co-owner of the Country Meadows Clinic in Thorndale. Paulsen grew up in Rockdale and received her degrees from Blinn College, Temple College, and Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. She brings years of experience in providing rural health care to the task force. Courtney and her husband, Eric, live in Thorndale and raised their children in the Thorndale ISD school district.

**John Egger**, President of EBCO General Contractor in Cameron, Texas. Originally from upstate New York, John made Texas home at the age of 21. He currently serves on the Cameron Industrial Foundation, Citizen's National Bank Board of Directors, Cameron Futures Foundation Board of Directors, and previously served on the Cameron Economic Development Corporation Board of Directors. He and his wife, Karen, enjoy living in Cameron and spending time with their 5 grandchildren.

## **Investigation**

The Milam County Medical Task Force has met over a period of seven months to evaluate the status of medical care availability and EMS deficiencies in Milam County. Presentations have been made by various organizations and knowledgeable individuals to enlighten the task force on subjects pertaining to rural healthcare, hospital management, and emergency medical services. Speakers included current EMS providers, first responders, area hospital representatives, the Texas Organization of Rural & Community Hospitals, and specialists who have been involved in saving, restoring, or rebuilding hospitals and medical services in rural areas. A list of presenters has been provided at the end of the recommendation.

It is the recommendation of the Milam County Medical Task Force that the citizens of Milam County move to establish an Emergency Service District to improve the emergency medical services available within Milam County.

There are two tax-based options for funding medical services; Emergency Services District (ESD) or Healthcare District. Both are initiated by signed petitions from 100 citizens of the county. After meeting the petition requirements, the petition can then be presented to the county commissioners

requesting the proposed district be placed on the ballot of upcoming elections for the county. Once approved by the commissioners the creation of the district can be voted on by the citizens at the next uniform election date. The primary difference between these two funding options is that an ESD focuses solely on emergency services, while a hospital district can fund ambulance services along with a broader spectrum of medical services like hospitals, clinics and emergency rooms.

The task force would agree that in the long run, a healthcare district would greatly benefit the county, however, the current economic health of the county would not support that at this time. Availability and access to emergency medical services in the county is the most immediate problem, with the greatest possibility of resolution. The task force believes an ESD is the best choice for the county at this time because it addresses a specific need at a relatively low ad valorem tax rate (maximum .10 per \$100).

Once an ESD is passed by the voters of the proposed district, the board can begin to make improvements to our current emergency medical services. The tax generated by the ESD would be countywide, sharing the cost of improving a service that is for the entire county.

If the ESD is to be created, there are several recommendations this task force has to ensure the best outcome and greatest benefit for the citizens of Milam County. The task force feels it would be essential for all the county commissioners, city officials, and community leaders to be in full support of the ESD. Action would need to be taken quickly, as it would be possible based on Texas law, for a vote on the ESD to be held on the November 2022 ballot.

It is recommended that an interim ESD board, acting as a task force/committee, be appointed to start meeting with SAFE-D the State Association for ESD's for guidance on the creation of such a district. This group would actively campaign for the ESD vote and would develop the initial plans for taking on the management of all the emergency medical services in Milam County. This group should be composed of 5-7 members, with representatives from throughout the county. Once established, the ESD Board should evaluate the deficiencies of the Milam County EMS system and take the appropriate corrective actions to resolve these issues.

We are fortunate to have the PHI Helicopter services contracted with the county. However, there are some weather-based limitations on their ability to provide the best service for the people of Milam County due to inadequate

equipment at our local airports. The county should urge the cities of Cameron and Rockdale to work with the Texas Department of Transportation to upgrade the instrument flight equipment at both the airports to allow for safe landing and take-off regardless of the weather conditions

Successfully creating an ESD and improving emergency medical care within the county is step 1 in making Milam County a better and safer place to live. Additional steps will need to be taken in conjunction with the ESD. Step 2 would be promoting the utilization of the medical services we have in our county like the HealthPoint Clinic, County Meadows Clinic, Scott & White Clinic, CamRock Clinic, Monette Schweitzer, and the OnMed telemedicine station. These are important assets to our county and we need to use to avoid losing them. We typically see Cameron residents travel to Temple for services, Rockdale and Thorndale residents utilize services in Taylor and Round Rock. Increased use of telemedicine services would also be beneficial and the introduction of telemedicine on school campuses could be a huge asset to the families of our county.

It should be noted that the economic forecast in Milam County has changed since the formation of this task force with the sale of the Alcoa property and the anticipated arrival of Samsung in nearby Taylor. While healthcare providers have

made it clear that a hospital or stand-alone emergency room is not currently viable in Milam County without a significant taxpayer funded subsidy, this could change with the introduction of large employers in Milam County and surrounding areas.

## **Presentations:**

May 11, 2021-PHI Air Medical

May 25, 2021 – AMR

June 8, 2021 – CHI/St. Joseph Health

Kurt Sunderman, Administrator Burleson Caldwell critica access hospital

Ricardo Diaz, Chief Operating Officer for St. Joseph Health in Bryan/College Station

June 22, 2021 – Clay Avery, Assistant Executive director of Safe-D, State Association of Fire and Emergency Services.

July 13, 2021 – Cameron Onks, Director of Innovative Healthcare Technology, Texas Tech University.

July 27, 2021- Fletcher Brown, with Waller Law Firm. Provided details on how to establish a Hospital District.

Karolyn Puccio, President of Rockdale Hospital District Board of + Directors

August 10, 2021 – Current healthcare providers in Milam County

August 24, 2021 – Milam County Fire Chiefs

September 14, 2021 – Milam County Law Enforcement Agencies

September 28, 2021 – Kelly Cheek – Texas Rural Health Association  
Terra New

Mike Easley – Former President of Texas Rural Health Association

October 12, 2021 – Dr. Nancy Dickey, Texas A&M University

October 26. 2021 – Daniel Oaks – Air Operations Manager of Airlift Texas, firefighter/paramedic for Bulverde-Spring Branch Fire-EMS Department

John Henderson – CEO/President, Texas Organization of Community & Rural Hospitals