

Dear Marco Island residents:

Many of you remember when we came together to save our Urgent Care Center, keeping medical services on Marco Island. We now are facing a crisis that is just as critical to our health and safety.

The Board of Collier County Commissioners has initiated a straw poll ballot question on March 15 that could affect local paramedics and ambulance service by handing county control of EMS to an independent taxing district in the unincorporated areas of the county. Since Collier County government appears to be getting out of fire and EMS services, Marco Island residents should know upfront exactly how this will affect them.

Marco Island is an incorporated city and will not vote on the ballot question. At first blush, the city seems outside the issue; but in truth, **it could severely increase our costs, decrease our services and remove any voice we might have in quality or the level of care we receive when emergency medical care is needed.**

In the past fiscal year, Marco Island taxpayers contributed over \$3 million per year to the county EMS system. Our voice should be heard in how this money is spent.

I urge you to read the attached article on what the county is doing and how we can make our voices heard. We have a solution that will need the support of everyone on Marco Island.

As residents, your voice can be heard even without a vote in the straw poll. Contact county and state officials **and tell them you want local control of all fire and emergency medical services and determination over how and where your tax dollars are spent. Marco Island wants its own Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (C.O.P.C.N.) for EMS and transport.**

Below are links to officials who need to know how you feel and the outcome you want implemented. If the county wants out of EMS services, the city will work with them to make a transition to city control appear seamless.

Sincerely,  
Bob Brown  
Marco Island City Council Chairman

**County Government**

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**County Commissioners**

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**State Representatives**

**Rep. Kathleen Passidomo**

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**Rep. Matt Hudson**

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**Senator Garrett Richter**

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## **County Emergency Services Consolidation: Bad for Marco Island**

Marco Island residents may have heard that Collier County's Board of County Commissioners has approved a straw poll question on the March 15 ballot to create an independent fire and emergency medical response district. The district would provide services to unincorporated Collier County: those areas not within the boundaries of an incorporated city.

Marco Island residents will not vote in the poll. The straw poll will be open only to county voters outside Naples and Marco Island. At first blush, it would seem Marco Island would be unaffected by the vote because it is a city, but County Commissioners have been inexplicably silent about their plans.

Since Collier County government appears to be getting out of fire and EMS services, Marco Island residents should know upfront exactly how this will affect them. If an independent response district is created and EMS is turned over to it, Marco Island residents could see increased costs, reduced services and loss of local control.

The county, as a qualifying government, currently receives its certificate to practice advanced life support for emergency medical and transport services from the State of Florida. In turn, Marco Island has an inter-local government agreement with the county.

The agreement benefits the island because Marco Island firefighters are cross-trained as paramedics to work on their own or alongside county personnel. When responding to an emergency medical call, these island firefighter/paramedics can provide the same lifesaving medical care whether arriving by fire truck, ambulance or other emergency vehicles.

The city and county work as partners with the Office of the Medical Director that oversees emergency patient care, reviews treatment and response times and sets training regimens to maintain a high standard of care.

Island taxpayers pay the county nearly \$3.2 million annually for county EMS services. The county also earns approximately \$1 million in transport fees from Marco Island residents and visitors that use ambulance services.

In return, Marco Island receives one full-time ambulance co-staffed by county and island paramedics and a 6-month, 12-hour-per-day seasonal ambulance. The remainder of those funds pays for off-island EMS services which serve as backup.

The County Commissioner's actions and the March 15th ballot question put Marco Island's EMS services at risk, and no clear plan exists to protect island residents.

The unanswered questions boggle the mind:

- Why is a straw ballot being posed to county voters with no public education or outreach regarding service levels, costs or financial impacts?
- What will happen to the total \$25 million in taxes and revenue that is used to fund county EMS currently? Including Marco Island's \$4 million?

- How many ambulances (medical transport) would be on Marco Island and who would staff them? What can residents expect for response times?
- Would local firefighter/paramedics be able to administer life-saving medical treatments as they do now?

The straw poll will likely be supported and County Commissioners will view it as a mandate to proceed. County government is being close-lipped about any plan beyond establishing the district and is giving Marco Island government and residents no say in a matter that directly impacts lifesaving services.

When recent fire districts combined to make the Greater Naples Fire District, it taxed residents at 1.5 mils for fire services. Marco Island residents currently pay only .6 mils for such service that includes fire and our paramedic fire units. With no local control, the plan could force Marco Island and its tax base to join the independent district just to maintain services. Marco Island residents could be required to pay 1.5 mils or greater.

It is unclear how the independent district could operate at 1.5 mils since some districts it would consolidate have millage rates as high as 4.2 mils. Costs and debt would be spread over the district, and for Marco Island, that could raise rates significantly.

If a \$25-million-dollar EMS system is added to that district – currently funded through countywide taxes and transport revenue – how millage rates will be assessed is anyone's guess because the county has not spelled out any details.

So, what's true if EMS is given to an independent Fire Taxing District?

- There is no current plan available that addresses what would happen to Marco Island's emergency services.
- Marco Island would not be within the independent district's boundaries.
- Island residents would have no say in response times or medical oversight.
- Collier County would not be in the fire/emergency services business, so no local agreement would exist between Marco Island and the county.
- If Marco Island residents found it necessary to join the new district, costs for services would most likely increase more than twofold and residents would lose their local Fire/EMS control.
- Without an inter-local agreement, Marco Island firefighter/paramedics could not operate under state law. The only services they could provide would be very basic such as taking blood pressures or providing oxygen – no lifesaving drugs, no IVs, no EKGs – no life support whatsoever.
- Marco Island could be left with a Fire Station but no control over ambulance service and no paramedics.
- The county still could require Marco Island taxpayers to ante up the millions it already pays but give that money to another fire department.

The answer for Marco Island residents is taking control of their own certificate to practice advanced life support. The city could qualify for a certificate under state law if County Commissioners grant permission. With it, Marco Island paramedics could operate using current

guidelines under the Office of the Medical Director, retain ambulance service on the island and transport residents to a hospital. Residents and the city would retain control of ambulances and have a voice in the quality of service.

It's a logical next step in light of the uncertainties and cost increases Collier County's action could trigger. The best course is to retain our fire and emergency medical responders that have been serving us for 50 years and keep tax dollars on the island and under local control. Marco Island's Fire Department can offer the same or better level of service existing currently.

As residents, your voice can be heard even without a vote in the straw poll. **Contact your local county and state officials and tell them you want local control of all fire and emergency medical services and determination over how and where your tax dollars are spent. Marco Island wants its own Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (C.O.P.C.N.) for EMS and transport.**