



NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Dr. Thomas A. Stith, III
President

February 15, 2021

Ms. Nadine Pfeiffer
Rule Review Manager
NC Department of Health and Human Services
Raleigh, NC 27603
DHSR.RulesCoordinator@dhhs.nc.gov

Dear Ms. Pfeiffer,

The purpose of the letter is to provide public comment on proposed rules changes to 10A NCAC 13P Emergency Medical Services and Trauma Rules, as published on December 15, 2020, *NC Register* (Volume 35 Issue 12).

These comments' substance aligns with the proposed revisions' intent to strengthen Emergency Medical Services' profession. However, we respectfully request clarification about the implementation period and grandfathering provisions for this rules package. Further, we respectfully request, provide the rationale, and propose **a minimum 18-month implementation period for educational institutions to comply with the rule for national accreditation of Educational Institutions offering AEMT and Paramedic programs and grandfathering provisions for rules related to Level I and Level II EMS Instructors and Educational Program Coordinators**. These specific rules are included below for reference (areas of concern are in bold):

10A NCAC 13P .0501 EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

(c) Educational programs approved to qualify EMS personnel for AEMT and Paramedic credentialing shall meet the requirements of Paragraph (b) of this Rule and **possess verification of accreditation or a valid letter of review from the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) or other accrediting agency determined using the professional judgment of OEMS staff following a comparison of standards.** (NC Register Volume 35 Issue 12, pages 1354-1355)

10A NCAC 13P .0507 INITIAL CREDENTIALING REQUIREMENTS FOR LEVEL I EMS INSTRUCTORS

(a) Applicants for credentialing as a Level I EMS Instructor shall:

- (1) be currently credentialed by the OEMS as an EMT, AEMT, or Paramedic;
- (2) have **completed post-secondary level education equal to or exceeding a minimum of an Associate Degree** from an institution accredited by an approved agency listed on the U.S. Department of Education website, www.ed.gov: (NC Register Volume 35 Issue 12, page 1356)

10A NCAC 13P .0508 INITIAL CREDENTIALING REQUIREMENTS FOR LEVEL II EMS INSTRUCTORS

(a) Applicants for credentialing as a Level II EMS Instructor shall:

- (1) be currently credentialed by the OEMS as an EMT, AEMT, or Paramedic;
- (2) be currently credentialed by the OEMS as a Level I Instructor at the EMT, AEMT, or Paramedic level;
- ~~(2)~~(3) have **completed post-secondary level education equal to or exceeding an Associate Degree; a Bachelor's Degree** from an institution accredited by an approved agency listed on the U.S. Department of Education website, www.ed.gov: (NC Register Volume 35 Issue 12, page 1357)

Our office has observed that N.C. Office of EMS typically provides for transition periods and grandfathering when issuing new or amended rules. However, since the *NC Register* specifies an anticipated effective date of July 1, 2021, and does not include such details, we make the following requests and provide related public comments supporting this identified need.

Requests

- **As related to proposed rule 10A NCAC 13P .0501(c) (national accreditation of AEMT and Paramedic programs), we respectfully request an 18-month implementation period to allow time for compliance.**
- **As related to 10A NCAC 13P .0507(a)(2) (required associate degrees for Level I instructors) and 10A NCAC 13P .0508(a)(3) (required bachelor's degrees for Level II instructors), we respectfully request a grandfathering provision for existing instructors in good standing.**
- **As related to Educational Program Coordinators, who under current and new rules must be Level II EMS Instructors, and therefore will have to possess a bachelor's degree moving forward, we respectfully request a grandfathering provision for existing full-time or part-time Coordinators to allow them to remain in their Coordinator role under the current Level II rules if they remain in this Coordinator capacity continuously at the same institution from when the new rules go into effect.**

Rationale

First, it is essential to note that while this rules package is not unexpected and is consistent with EMS's educational vision at national and state levels, the lack of a specified implementation period and grandfathering is concerning. While N.C. Office of EMS has discussed proposals at numerous regional meetings and other venues since 2019; the process's details and results were not available for review by educational institutions until December 15, 2020. As currently worded, they will be official on the effective date this year, not providing educational institutions a reasonable time for compliance.

It is important to note most college EMS Educational Institutions are already in compliance with most or all of these rules or are in the middle of a strategic transition toward compliance. However, there are programs compliant under current rules but not yet nationally accredited. They rely on instructors and key program managers with Level I and Level II EMS credentials, who are again qualified under current rules but will not meet the new rule requirements for higher degrees as of July 1, 2021. A transition period and grandfathering provision will minimize disruption to the current EMS education and workforce pipeline by allowing colleges and communities to identify financial and staffing resources needed to support compliance while continuing current programming.

Specifically, we believe that an implementation period of 18-months for national accreditation and grandfathering of Level I and Level II instructors is necessary and reasonable for the following reasons:

- **The accreditation process is lengthy:** Based on guidance from currently accredited programs and consultation with CoAEMP staff, it is not reasonably possible for institutions to work through the national accreditation process in the time between final adoption and the anticipated effective date of July 1, 2021. National accreditation takes at least 6 to 18 months to progress to the necessary Letter of Review (LoR) stage, depending on resources and other circumstances.

- **Additional resources will be needed in already strained times:** COVID-19 has negatively impacted financial resources at colleges and put unprecedented strains on students, instructors, administrators, and the communities they partner with to support EMS education. EMS educational institutions are already implementing new EMS education and credentialing guidelines with 2021 compliance deadlines requiring additional resources and program and personnel alignment. Therefore, sufficient time is needed to identify financial resources to support these additional rules changes.
- **The absence of an 18-month implementation period will disproportionately impact rural and Tier 1 and 2 distressed counties:** According to the website of the national accrediting body CAHEEP/CoAEMSP, as of February 12, 2021, 39 of the state's 58 community colleges have programs that are fully accredited or are under a Letter of Review. The remaining colleges serve rural or distressed counties that are already significantly resource-constrained, even without the strains of COVID-19. Providing an 18-month implementation period would also allow resource allocation to span two fiscal years, ensuring fewer workforce pipeline disruptions as programs align to the new standards.
- **Programs need time to recruit newly qualified Level I and Level II instructors/education coordinators.** There are currently qualified instructors and education program coordinators who do not have the associate or bachelor's degrees required under these new rules. Without a grandfathering clause, some currently viable EMS education programs would be required to immediately identify different instructors and/or education coordinators while also doing the work required of national accreditation amid the strains of COVID-19. These additional strains will disrupt these critical workforce programs' stability and continuity across the state and in our most vulnerable communities. Historically, it has been more challenging to identify appropriately qualified instructors and education program coordinators in rural areas, making planning and recruitment time crucial.

Summary

North Carolina can be proud of the path forward being laid by these new EMS education rules. However, we posit that a clearly defined implementation period with grandfathering provisions is both reasonable and necessary and will not negatively impact this forward momentum.

Thank you for your consideration. Please let Tracy McPherson, Director of Public Safety Training Programs, or me know if you have questions for our office. We may be reached via email at mcphersont@nccommunitycolleges.edu or humphreyn@nccommunitycolleges.edu or by phone at (919)807-7117 or (919)807-7159.

Respectfully,

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