

June 28, 2018

Edward Van Horne
President & Chief Executive Officer
American Medical Response (AMR)
3325 V St NE
Washington, DC 20018

RE: An open letter urging a fair contract

Dear Mr. Van Horne:

This letter urges AMR to promptly adopt a fair contract with employees in Washington, DC, represented by AFSCME Local 20. A prompt and fair contract would be consistent with AMR's stated values of "making a difference by caring for people in need" and AMR's promise that "we will treat our patients, customers and teams with respect."

Our Washington, DC, community also values caring for its working families by assuring that they can afford decent local housing, commuting, and health care. These values are reflected in DC's higher minimum wage, HealthLink Gold standards, and our public contracts that call on contractors to assure that most employees reside, and can afford to live, in the District.

In March 2017, AMR's EMTs and paramedics in Washington, DC, voted overwhelmingly to join AFSCME Council 20 and to bargain for improved wages, benefits, and work rules. The union took prompt action to set bargaining dates and gather relevant information about the bargaining unit. AMR's chief negotiator has been available for negotiations only a few days each month. AMR has failed to provide all the information required for good faith bargaining, and the union has had to file unfair labor practice charges to enforce its rights. AMR's stalling and failure to complete its disclosure of information relevant to bargaining is less than respectful and falls short of our community standards.

More seriously, AMR's management has made unacceptable demands for deep concessions on benefits. Simultaneously, AMR management withheld a scheduled wage hike in July 2017 – another unfair labor practice. AMR is proposing

minimal pay raises, which would not meet the goal of providing living wage jobs in DC.

Although AMR apparently gave non-bargaining unit staff a 3% across-the-board increase in July 2017, its proposals for the bargaining unit have been for annual raises less than 3%. AMR is failing to employ a majority of DC residents as provided in its contract with the District. The company has offered false excuses by claiming there are no EMS training programs in DC. AMR's bargaining proposals set the wrong direction to help with recruitment and retention.

More troublingly, management unilaterally changed health benefits in 2018 dramatically reducing the value of health, prescription, dental, and vision coverage. AMR froze the dollar amount it contributed. AMR proposes paying 80% of Bronze plan premiums in 2019, versus cost sharing in 2017 based on Gold plans.

AMR also seeks to move backward on paid time off (PTO), which is already insufficient and does not provide a separate sick leave allotment. By putting all leave in one "bucket," AMR's proposal would create an incentive for workers to perform their duties while sick. A healthcare company should set a better example. We are also deeply concerned that AMR has backtracked on the amount of leave time it will permit.

AMR must also resolve the sharp disagreements on attendance policy. AMR's national employee handbook establishes a 4 minute and 59 second grace period before lateness constitutes an "occurrence" for attendance monitoring purposes. The handbook also treats tardiness and absences separately, appropriately recognizing that being late is qualitatively different than missing a shift entirely. Despite its handbook, AMR is now demanding a one-minute grace period for attendance purposes, and wants to combine tardiness and absences as "occurrences" which could lead to discipline. AMR is now enforcing a zero-tolerance policy (no grace period), and claiming that this supersedes its handbook. This smacks of retaliation for the protected activity of organizing a union and bargaining for better pay, benefits and working conditions. Here in Washington, DC, transit is notoriously unpredictable. Commuters and employees with disabilities need a

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reasonable level of flexibility in scheduling. A punitive attendance policy is contrary to our community standards.

Normally, a first contract is reached within one year of certification. It has now been 15 months, and AMR has failed to show its readiness to conclude the negotiations transparently and fairly. It has failed to respect its employees and our community standards. Its proposals are unhealthy and uncaring.

The union and its members are fighting for fair pay, decent benefits, and respect in the workplace. These improvements would not just help workers support their families; they would also enable AMR to recruit and retain more District residents (an explicit goal of its contract with the District), while helping to professionalize EMS jobs. The work AMR employees do is crucial to high-quality patient care in the District and surrounding jurisdictions.

On March 18, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King told AFSCME members in Memphis, Tennessee, that, "Now our struggle is for genuine equality, which means economic equality." He decried how most people living in poverty were working. "We are tired of being at the bottom." "We can all get more together than we can apart."

The DC Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild calls on AMR to get together with AFSCME Council 20, stop its unfair practices and fulfill its stated policies of making a difference by caring for its employees' needs and treating them with respect.

Respectfully,



Matthew F. Mihalich, Esq.
Chair,
And the Executive Board,
Of the Washington, D.C. Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild.