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## **911: Emergency Medical Service Workers struggle with low pay, working conditions**

*New study shows that EMS workers' wages are low and stagnating and the jobs are dangerous, with high rates of mortality, injury, mental and physical trauma.*

**CONTACT:** Jacqueline Sullivan | IRLE Media Relations  
[jsullivan@berkeley.edu](mailto:jsullivan@berkeley.edu), (510) 604-2289

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**Berkeley** – More than 16,000 emergency medical service workers are employed in California, with the vast majority working for private providers. Wages in the industry are low, employees work long hours often without rest and meal breaks, and injury rates are high, according to a joint study by UC Berkeley's Center for Labor Research and Education and the UCLA Labor Center.

The [study](#) looks at working conditions addressed in the Emergency Medical Services Workers' (EMS) Bill of Rights, or Assembly Bill 263, proposed today by Assemblymember Freddie Rodriguez (D-Pomona/Chino).

Emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and paramedics provide critical pre-hospital emergency care often in life or death situations. Unfortunately, the stress of the job and long work shifts can take a toll on their health. Previous research has found that EMS workers suffer disproportionately from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and suicidal ideation.

"The research highlights the working conditions for EMS workers across the state. Today EMS workers don't have adequate rest and meal breaks, protections against violence in the workplace, or access to mental health care. As a legislator and EMT for more than 30 years, I am obligated to speak out for the thousands of hardworking individuals who are integral to our healthcare system," said Assemblymember Rodriguez.

The [report](#) sheds light on the structure and oversight of EMS jobs across California where wages and working conditions vary considerably by employer. More than 80 percent of EMTs and paramedics work for private firms. These jobs lag well behind their public-sector counterparts in terms of job quality, compensation, and opportunities for career advancement. Because of the expected growth in California's elderly population, EMS jobs will grow quickly over the next ten years, and, with stronger labor standards, could provide a ladder to the middle class for many California families.

Key findings include:

- In 2014, the median hourly wage for private-sector EMTs and paramedics in California was \$16.59. Forty percent of California EMTs were low-wage workers, defined as earning less than \$13.63 an hour (which is two thirds of the state median).
- Private-sector EMTs and paramedics earned 39 percent less than their public sector counterparts. Even when controlling for age, gender, geography, education, and race and ethnicity, public sector wages were still much higher than private-sector wages.
- One quarter of private-sector EMS workers in California were in households with incomes below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line, compared to 14 percent of those in the public sector.
- The common practice of ‘posting’ (where EMT units await calls while parked rather than at a comfort station) increases the likelihood of back pain and makes it difficult to take breaks. Temperature regulation is difficult in summer and winter, and posting locations are often unsafe.

“Government furnishes nearly 60 percent of revenue to private-sector EMS providers, while public agencies license and grant contracts for exclusive operating areas,” according to Saba Waheed, co-author of the report and research director at the UCLA Labor Center. “With such public investment, California should set a higher standard for wages and working conditions.”

“Emergency medical technicians and paramedics provide vital health care to California families,” said Ken Jacobs, chair of the UC Berkeley Labor Center. “Addressing working conditions will help make careers sustainable for workers while improving our emergency medical care.”

## CONTACT

**Ken Jacobs**, report co-author, Chair, Center for Labor Research and Education at UC Berkeley, [kjacobs9@berkeley.edu](mailto:kjacobs9@berkeley.edu), (510) 643-2621 (office), (415) 516-3135 (cell)

**Saba Waheed**, report co-author, Research Director, UCLA Labor Center, [swaheed@ucla.edu](mailto:swaheed@ucla.edu), (213) 480-4155 x214

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