



# CITY OF SAINT PAUL

## ALASKA

### NEWS RELEASE

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**SUBJECT: EMS Services for Saint Paul Island in Jeopardy: How the Collapse of Bering Sea Crab Fisheries is Impacting a Local Community**

As the new year rings in, so do budgetary cuts, hiring freezes, reduction of services and cuts to essential services in the Pribilof Island's most populated island and the epicenter of the Bering Sea fisheries. One of the essential services that was cut was funding to contract with Delta Medical Transport (Delta) to provide EMS services to the island's community.

In October of 2022, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADFG) announced that the Bering Sea snow crab and Bristol Bay red king crab (BBRKC) would be closed for the 2022-2023 season. The closure of the snow crab fishery is the first in the 40-year history of the fishery and responds to ADFG scientists' concerns about the poor status of this stock.

Saint Paul Island's economy is approximately 90% dependent on the snow crab fishery. The activities associated with the harvesting and delivery of crab to the Trident Seafoods shore-side plant for processing is the primary source of municipal taxes and local revenues, underpins other fishery and business activities such as the local halibut fishery, and sustains the harbor and other fisheries-related infrastructure built on the island at considerable federal, state, and local expense since the phase-out of the commercial fur seal harvest in 1984. To make matters worse, the BBRKC fishery – a portion of which is delivered and processed on Saint Paul Island in the fall months – will remain closed for a second year in a row.

In normal years, the City of Saint Paul Island collects on average about \$2,500,000 in fisheries taxes. In 2023 it will only collect about \$200,000. "Without the taxes derived from crab processing our municipal government will struggle to support essential municipal services such as public safety, road maintenance, and emergency medical services," noted Saint Paul Island Mayor Jacob Mercurief.

As a result of the closure of the Bering Sea crab fisheries and the complete loss of fisheries tax revenues of approximately \$2.5 million, the City of Saint Paul has been forced to implement budgetary cuts, hiring freezes, and other painful measures to withstand the loss of revenues and continue to provide basic municipal services. "The Council of the City of Saint Paul declared the closure of the Bering Sea snow crab and Bristol Bay red king crab fisheries for the 2022/23 season a social, cultural and economic disaster and emergency," stated Phillip Zavadil, City Manager.

In October 2021, after losing EMT personnel due to the City's COVID-19 vaccination requirement, the City began contracting with Delta to provide emergency medical service (EMS) to the community. The contract between the City and Delta specified that Delta would provide basic life support services to the

community via one EMT I or higher and that the EMT would be on call 24/7 while working on island and would rotate out once a month.

Prior to having EMTs on staff, the City provided EMS services to the community through a combination volunteer service and police officers being crossed trained at the emergency trauma technician (ETT) level. “This option worked; however, utilizing volunteers does not always provide for consistent reliable service,” says Zavadil. “Additionally, to provide licensed basic life support (or BLS) service, we need to have an emergency medical technician (EMT) level provider. The benefits of having a licensed BLS service is that we will be required to have an EMT on each EMS run. EMTs can provide a higher level of care than personnel trained at an ETT level. EMTs can also provide additional support to the medical providers at the health center under their direction. Also, a licensed BLS service will allow for billing of insurance, which can supplement the cost of the service.”

The cost to bring one rotating EMT to the island for the whole year is \$165,000, or \$13,750 each month.

On December 30, 2022, the Aleut Community of Saint Paul Island and the Central Bering Sea Fisherman's Association donated enough funds to maintain EMS services by Delta Medical Transport for the month of January 2023.

The City is urgently asking for donations in order to keep this critical service available to the community of Saint Paul. An additional \$150,234 in funding is needed to provide EMS services to the community at BLS level for the remainder of 2023.

On December 27, 2022, the City initiated the “Save Saint Paul’s EMS” fundraising campaign. To date, \$2,480 has been raised to help fund EMS services.

“For its contribution,” Zavadil added, “the City will continue to provide a vehicle, ambulance, and housing for the rotating EMT. Additionally, the City will handle permitting of the service, billing, and purchase of supplies.”

*To donate, please visit <https://donorbox.org/save-saint-paul-island-alaska>*