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Dear citizens of Lakewood,

I've been helping protect and save the lives of Lakewood residents for more than 33 years. As fire chief, I take my job very seriously; my No. 1 goal is to keep all of the members of this community safe.

There's no healthcare proposal that I would support that did not keep residents safe and meet the healthcare needs of Lakewood.

The narrative that's been floated in the community that "people will die" in transit to nearby healthcare facilities is dangerous rhetoric, completely false, and insulting to the men and women sworn to keep our residents safe each day.

After watching a recent posting of an edited video of three Lakewood firefighters speaking about the closure of Lakewood Hospital and its impact — and after reading several mistruths printed in area publications, including the Cleveland Scene magazine — I feel compelled to respond to those statements.

The remarks made by these three firefighters are a reflection of their earnestness but also their lack of experience within the fire department. Perhaps more importantly, these firefighters have in no manner been involved with the evaluation and review of the statistical data in relation to the proposed elimination of inpatient beds at Lakewood Hospital and the pre-hospital emergency medical care in Lakewood.

Let's talk about the truth.

The truth is that if the city and the Cleveland Clinic agree on the new 24/7 emergency room in Lakewood, most of the patients transported by the Lakewood Fire Department will continue to be taken to, and treated at, the new emergency room.

The truth about this emergency room is that it is far more than a "minute clinic" as some in our community have called it.

The truth is that this type of emergency room has been in place in Cuyahoga County for more than 30 years, serving the emergency medical needs of their communities in an exceptional manner.

The truth is that a 2014 study out of the University of California San Francisco shouldn't be used to support a faulty narrative that "lives will be lost" if the hospital transitions to a 24/7 ER. That study highlights the detrimental effects on communities when emergency rooms **close** — the proposal before us is to **open** a new, state-of-the-art emergency room. I wonder if people bother to click the link to read the headline.

When addressing the issue of transport time, it is true that it may take longer (on average, between six and eight minutes) to transport to Fairview Hospital or MetroHealth Medical Center than the current Lakewood Hospital, but those increased times are still far less than other communities' transport times.

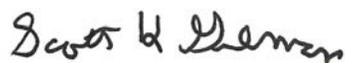
Contrary to the statements made on this recently released and edited video, the Lakewood Fire Department has called for EMS mutual aid only seven times in 2015, and of those calls three were a result of all other units operating at fires.

Since the 1999 merger of the Lakewood Fire Department and the Lakewood EMS, we have expanded service to meet the needs of our residents. Consultants at that time recommended that we staff two ambulances and cross-train firefighters as first responders, we've soundly exceeded these recommendations. In addition, Lakewood fire trucks are also equipped with a substantial amount of equipment/pharmaceutical supplies — just like the EMS vehicles.

The training, technology, experience, and institutional knowledge and skills of our Lakewood's first responders cannot be underestimated.

Let's get our facts straightened out, so we can all make the best decisions for our community in the long-term.

Respectfully,



Scott K. Gilman
Fire Chief, City of Lakewood