



Skagit County EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

Josh Pelonio, Director

Matthew Russell, M.D., Medical Program Director

January 26, 2026

Washington State Department of Health

Emergency Care System

Health Systems Quality Assurance

Attn: HELMS Team

P.O. Box 47865

Olympia, WA 98504-7865

RE: Healthcare Enforcement and Licensing Management System (HELMS)

To the Washington State Department of Health,

We are writing to formally express our continuing and growing concerns regarding the inadequacies and overall dysfunctionality of the Healthcare Enforcement and Licensing Management System (HELMS). We are nearly a year into the transition to HELMS, and it remains a significant operational barrier for regional EMS administration and local EMS agencies, draining many hours of limited staff time, and causing us to create tedious manual workarounds just to accomplish basic credentialing and oversight functions. To date, the system has proven to have much less functionality than the previous system and zero notable improvements.

As a county EMS system with administrative staff responsible for monitoring EMS personnel training and credentialing compliance, we rely heavily on timely, accurate, and accessible credentialing information from HELMS. Our role also includes supporting EMS personnel and agencies in our county, with administrative tasks including initial issuance and recertification processes. We are also responsible for ensuring that safe, effective, competent medical care is always provided to the public, by appropriately credentialed EMS personnel. Unfortunately, the current state of HELMS is significantly hindering our ability to meet these obligations.

Over the past year, we have encountered persistent issues and noticed deficiencies with HELMS including:

- Affiliation change applications frequently show up for MPD in HELMS but not County Coordinators. Our workflow process requires County Coordinator verification of protocol testing and other administrative items prior to MPD review and approval;
- Email notifications: MPD receives numerous (10+) identical email notifications from HELMS daily, indicating there are pending items in his HELMS queue (with no details on what specifically is pending). Upon logging in there are no items requiring action. County Coordinators receive no email notifications at all. (see **Attachment A**);

- Data Export: We are unable to export a county-wide personnel roster from the system to import into other systems for effective monitoring of expiration dates, verification of endorsements and EMS Evaluator and Senior EMS Instructor approvals (without exporting 25+ agencies one at a time);
- Initial EMT applicants not receiving the appropriate credential endorsements (supraglottic airway) despite their course completion certificate (and course approval application submitted by the training program to and approved by the DOH) stating that the course met the additional requirements to obtain the endorsement;
- Inability for County Coordinators or Medical Program Directors to access contact information for personnel submitting initial or renewal applications or agency affiliation changes or to save a hard copy. We have no way to contact the individual to work through deficiencies, ensure compliance with protocol testing and other MPD-required administrative processes to ensure timely application approval;
- Inability for MPD or County Coordinator to view/access aid and ambulance service agency license expiration dates. Since DOH will not notify us of upcoming agency expirations in our county, or copy us on agency application deficiency notices, this is the only way for us to track and assist agencies in submitting renewal applications in time. After discovering several agency licenses had been expired for months without our knowledge, we began tracking agency license expiration dates which we were at least able to view in the old system.

These items all prevent us from completing routine and time-sensitive credential processing tasks in a timely manner. These problems have forced our staff to spend substantial additional time troubleshooting, repeating work, or seeking manual workarounds. The cumulative impact has been a notable increase in administrative workload, delays in processing, and unnecessary strain on personnel who are already managing high operational demands. We fully recognize the complexity of implementing and maintaining a statewide licensing platform. However, the current performance of HELMS is clearly not meeting the needs of the agencies and professionals who depend on it.

We are told that the “final release” of HELMS is scheduled for March of this year and yet we have not received any indication that any of our concerns will be resolved. In fact, we have been told that many of our concerns are simply “not a priority” for the DOH. We are aware of other counties that have opted to discontinue use of HELMS completely, and return to a fully manual, paper-only process. This obviously defeats the intended purpose of the HELMS platform, but we too are considering this pathway in the absence of any timely, meaningful improvements. We respectfully request that the DOH prioritize system stabilization, improve communication regarding updates and known issues, solicit feedback from actual end-users before concluding updates, and provide clear timelines for meaningful improvements.

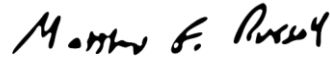
Our goal is to work collaboratively toward a solution that supports both the DOH and the EMS community. We would welcome the opportunity to participate in workgroups, user feedback/listening sessions, testing, or any other efforts that could help ensure HELMS becomes a reliable and functional tool for all EMS stakeholders in the state. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to seeing

progress that will reduce the administrative burden on local agencies and better support the EMS workforce across Washington State.

Sincerely,



Josh Pelonio, Director
Skagit County EMS



Dr. Matthew F. Russell, M.D., Medical Program Director
Skagit County EMS

CC: Greg Perry, Executive Director, North Region EMS & Trauma Care Council
Deborah Arthur, EMS Manager, Whatcom County EMS
Scott Dorsey, Director, Snohomish County EMS
Nick Walsh, Chair, Island County EMS Council

ATTACHMENT A

DOHHELMSSNo-Reply@DOH.WA.GOV

HELMS EMS Online Pending Items

📧 Pending items in HELMS portal; view at HELMS; call 360-236-4700 with questions

Trash - iCloud 4:06 AM

DOHHELMSSNo-Reply@DOH.WA.GOV

HELMS EMS Online Pending Items

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Trash - iCloud 4:05 AM

DOHHELMSSNo-Reply@DOH.WA.GOV

HELMS EMS Online Pending Items

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Trash - iCloud 4:03 AM

DOHHELMSSNo-Reply@DOH.WA.GOV

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Trash - iCloud 4:03 AM

DOHHELMSSNo-Reply@DOH.WA.GOV

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11 emails in one day to MPD
indicating "pending items in
HELMS portal"

Trash - iCloud 4:03 AM

DOHHELMSSNo-Reply@DOH.WA.GOV

HELMS EMS Online Pending Items

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Trash - iCloud 4:02 AM

DOHHELMSSNo-Reply@DOH.WA.GOV

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Trash - iCloud 4:02 AM

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Trash - iCloud 4:01 AM

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Trash - iCloud 4:01 AM

DOHHELMSSNo-Reply@DOH.WA.GOV

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Trash - iCloud 4:00 AM

DOHHELMSSNo-Reply@DOH.WA.GOV

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Trash - iCloud 4:00 AM

ATTACHMENT A



Help

Cart

My Communications

Matthew F Russell

Profession Credentialing Facility Credentialing Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Training and Education Programs Surveys

Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

* Indicates a required field

*Search Facility

SearchClear

Select Role

Medical Program Director

Any facilities that have a pending actions will appear red at the top of the list.

Account Name	Credential Name	UBI(Unified Business Identifier)	FEIN	Organization Name	County	Action
Skagit County Regional Fire Authority	AIDV.ES.61623805	605616511	994408731	Skagit County Regional Fire Authority	Skagit County	View
City of Anacortes Fire Department	AMBV.ES.00000590	291000003	916001224	City of Anacortes	Skagit County	View
Skagit County Fire District #9	AIDV.ES.00000574	602098282	91119117	Skagit County Fire District #9	Skagit County	View
Bay View Volunteer Fire Department	AIDV.ES.00000577	602158989	911414750	Skagit County Fire District 12	Skagit County	View
La Conner Fire Department	AIDV.ES.00000592	295000001	916001450	Town of La Conner	Skagit County	View

[View All](#)

No discernible items requiring attention in HELMS portal. Per instructions, pending actions should appear red at the top of the list.

Josh Pelonio

From: Fox, Shawna K (DOH) <Shawna.Fox@doh.wa.gov>
Sent: Friday, February 6, 2026 2:07 PM
To: Russell, Matthew (DOR); Josh Pelonio
Cc: Craig, Ratna (DOH Contractor); Geisler, Elizabeth G (DOH)
Subject: Skagit County EMS – DOH HELMS

Hello Josh & Dr. Russell,

Thank you for sharing your experience with HELMS and your continued partnership as we transition to this new system.

We recognize that this transition has been particularly challenging for Emergency Medical Services. This unintended outcome is unacceptable and remains a focus for our team. Over the past eight months, we have investigated, tested, and designed solutions to improve the functionality for all EMS users.

We understand that the issues you outlined are causing administrative burden for your team and impacting the time-sensitive nature of your work. These are known issues that our team has been working on for some time. Our ability to address these issues efficiently has been impacted by two primary factors: 1) the unique role and organization of EMS within the HELMS system, and 2) our team's technical bandwidth. These issues have been, and remain, a top priority for our teams.

To address the challenges we have encountered, our project team has organized a dedicated team to focus on the most critical issues. We are also committed to creating and supplying interim solutions for data-related issues.

We hope this approach will improve your experience, but we know there is more work to do to meet your requirements. As a technical project, our work is highly iterative, and we commit to sharing updates with you at MPD meetings and via program emails. The upcoming third release of HELMS does not include EMS features, but our maintenance and operations team will continue to work on EMS issues before and after the release.

We appreciate your patience and resilience in the face of these issues. Please know that we are acting with urgency and are committed to working with you to make meaningful progress.

Thank you,
DOH
HELMS

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ATTENTION FIRST RESPONDERS

Amtrak presents Passenger Train Emergency Responder (PTER) training, a no-cost emergency preparedness course to communities near the Amtrak service area. This course is encouraged for Firefighters, Emergency Medical Services, Law Enforcement, Emergency Managers, Emergency Communication Center dispatchers, medical examiners/ coroners or others who may respond to or be involved in Amtrak emergencies.

AMTRAK PASSENGER TRAIN EMERGENCY RESPONSE (PTER) COURSE

This training complies with Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) regulation 49 CFR 239. A classroom and hands-on emergency preparedness course for professionals who may respond to an Amtrak emergency is available. The course instruction includes an equipment specific handbook and field guide that can be shared. Please reach out to an Amtrak Emergency Manager to coordinate training, joint preparedness planning, exercises or drills.

TOPICS COVERED

Railroad Right of Way Safety
Passenger and Host Railroad Relationship
Emergency Contact Information
Railroad Nomenclature including how to identify:
 Railroad Switches, Mileposts, Signals,
 Crossings, Special Circumstances
 in Response to Passenger Train Incidents
Train Speeds

Passenger Train Crew Identification
Challenges of Extraction
Incident Command System
 for Railroad incidents
Trespassing on Railroad Property
Pneumatic and Electrical Hazards
Train Equipment Design
Incident Response Pre-Planning

CONTACT

Kerinne Monaco
Amtrak Emergency Manager
Mobile: 916-216-6920
email: Kerinne.Monaco@amtrak.com



**EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT**