SOLUTION SEEN IN LAFAYETTE

Private Ambulance Firm Gets Jury's OK

LAFAYETTE, La. — Lafayette Parish could have an answer to its ambulance service problem which threatens to leave the parish totally without the service on Sept. 1.

The parish police jury has authorized a private firm to go into the business of providing ambulance service on a subscription or membership basis. The firm's operation would be subject to a jury-drawn ordinance.

As indicated by their unanimous vote of approval, jurors were generally receptive to the idea of a private ambulance service — especially since the parish is faced with the prospect of being caught without the service on Sept. 1.

Funeral home directors in this and other parishes have announced that they will discontinue the service on Sept. 1 because increasingly stringent federal regulations make it economically unfeasible to continue providing the service.

Under the plan of Acadian Ambulance Service, Inc., 10,000 memberships at $15 each would be secured by Sept. 1. If the needed amount of memberships are not secured by that date the service would not be provided and the money paid by the company would be refunded, firm president Roland P. Dugas told jurors.

The service would begin at least on an emergency-call basis on Sept. 1, with the subscriber being entitled to free service for one year, Dugas said.

The service would be available for non-members at $35 per non-emergency call and $60 per emergency call, he said. The service would respond to all calls and only after the victim or patient is delivered to the hospital would the company ascertain whether the patient is a member or non-member, Dugas said.

Out-of-parish calls would be made at $40 per emergency call and $15 per non-emergency plus $1 per-mile fee, he added.

Dugas said some Pennsylvania cities operate on the same type of membership plan, as do Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

"Equipment and personnel will meet all federal and state requirements. Ambulances will be staffed 24 hours per day with medics," he noted.

Jury's Harold Domingue Sr., who urged that the firm be granted permission to go into business, emphasized that the jury's approval does not constitute the granting of an exclusive franchise to the firm. Plans by other companies and agencies will be considered if brought to the jury, he said.

Domingue said the state legislature has empowered the jury to either go into the ambulance business itself or to authorize other agencies or firms to do so, subject to jury ordinances.

Meanwhile, a new ambulance service forum is set for Tuesday in Lafayette at Holiday Inn.

Public officials and interested parties in the parishes of Acadia, Evangeline, Iberia, Lafayette, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary and Vermilion are being asked to attend. It is co-sponsored by the Evangeline Economic Development District and the Acadia Parish Council.