

# Blanco County Mourns Veteran Sgt. Doug Bledsoe After Fatal Medical Battle

by Thomas Wyatt | EIC, The Villager

**(VILLAGER)** - Blanco County is grieving the loss of Sgt. Doug Bledsoe, a decades long veteran of the Blanco County Sheriff's Office whose death this week has prompted an outpouring of tributes from law enforcement agencies across the Hill Country. Bledsoe, widely regarded as a steady, respected presence in the department, died after a severe medical battle that began with acute pancreatitis, according to regional law enforcement statements.

## A sudden medical crisis

Officials confirmed that Bledsoe's health declined rapidly following a three week fight with acute pancreatitis, a condition that can escalate into life threatening complications. The Texas Municipal Police Association acknowledged the seriousness of his medical struggle in the days leading up to his death, underscoring how quickly the illness overtook him.

## A career defined by longevity and service

Bledsoe served the Blanco County Sheriff's Office for decades, according to the Precinct 1 Constable's Office, making him one of the department's most experienced and recognizable figures. His tenure spanned years of population growth, political change, and shifting public safety demands in the rural county, where long serving deputies often become community anchors.

Colleagues described him as a mentor whose influence extended far beyond his supervisory role.



**Blanco County Deputy Sgt. Doug Bledsoe dies, agencies across the region mourn loss**

The Johnson City Police Department called him "more than a supervisor," emphasizing his role as a friend, guide, and stabilizing force for younger officers navigating the pressures of small town policing.

## Regional officials order flags lowered

Johnson City Mayor Stephanie Fisher ordered flags at City Hall lowered to half staff, calling Bledsoe's death a profound loss for the community. Her directive reflects the deep ties between local government and the sheriff's office in Blanco County, where law enforcement officers often serve as both first responders and community liaisons.

The Blanco Police Department and Johnson City Police Department also issued public statements mourning his passing, joining a growing list of agencies across the region acknowledging the void left by his death.

## A community accustomed to resilience faces a new kind of loss

Blanco County, like many rural Texas communities, relies heavily on long serving deputies who build trust through years of visibility and familiar-

ity. Bledsoe's death comes at a time when many small departments are already strained by staffing shortages, rising call volumes, and the emotional toll of repeated critical incidents.

His passing also echoes a broader pattern of sudden medical emergencies among law enforcement personnel nationwide, a trend highlighted by a separate California case referenced on the page where a sergeant died after a medical emergency on duty. While unrelated, the juxtaposition underscores the physical and emotional demands placed on officers in an era of heightened public safety pressures.

## Funeral arrangements pending

As of the latest updates, funeral arrangements and survivor information have not yet been released. Local officials say they expect a significant turnout from agencies across Central Texas once services are announced.

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## Black people revolutionized what we know today as EMTs. Rep. Summer Lee introduces bill to honor their history

By Gerren Keith Gaynor | theGrio



**Freedom House Ambulance Service staff members outside Presbyterian University Hospital in Pittsburgh on their first day in 1968.(Photo Credit: Virginia "Ginny" Caligiuri, via Heinz History Center**

**(theGrio)** - While the life-saving work of Emergency Medical Technicians, or EMTs, is seen as vital in communities across the country, few Americans likely know it was Black Americans who revolutionized the profession.

A new bill introduced by U.S. Rep. Summer Lee, D-Pa., seeks to shed light on the little-known history of the Freedom House Ambulance Service, America's first EMT service and the innovative Black leaders who made it happen.

"Black communities were not being served when there was an emergency...there was no one to take care of them, to get them to the hospital. There was no pre-hospital care. People were dying," Lee told theGrio of the Pittsburgh community in the 1960s.

Lee's bill seeks to award the now defunct Freedom House with a Congressional Gold Medal to be displayed at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

In 1965, the Freedom House Ambulance Service became the first emergency medical service in the United States to be staffed by paramedics with medical training beyond basic first aid, according to the bill's text. It was originally known as Freedom House Enterprises, which was founded to provide economic stimulation in Pittsburgh, specifically those in the predominantly Black Hill District, where a majority of the residents fell well below the poverty line. The goal of Freedom House Enterprises was to create job training and employment opportunities for residents and to provide training and employment opportunities for those deemed "unemployable" by the city welfare offices.

In 1965, Philip Hallen, who was president of the Maurice Falk Medical Fund and a former ambulance driver, and chairman of the OEO Health Committee, had the idea of creating a transformative model for emergency medical care that combined social justice with medical innovation. Hallen, joined by a group of individuals in medicine, began training medics for what would eventually become a revolutionary service for the Pittsburgh community, and later the entire nation.

"These were not doctors. They were not medical professionals. These are people, particularly men, who were underemployed who were in this job corps kind of program to get them employed," said Lee. "They became experts through this training, and then they were able to train other people, and it was able to multiply from there."

She added, "It was the investment in the people first that really was the foundation of the EMS service."

Ultimately, the Freedom House Ambulance Service was defunded in 1975 amid political opposition and racial tension.

"They would be disbanded because of how well they ran. The white communities felt like they were now missing out on something and they took the program," said Lee.

Despite its disbanding, the Freedom House's training model, clinical data, and innovations directly influenced the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's EMS standards and the national adoption of advanced life-support ambulance systems.

Congresswoman Lee, who recently delivered a fiery progressive response to President Trump's State of the Union address, said the ultimate dismantling of the Freedom House is eerily similar to how President Trump has "attacked" Black history and DEI. She told theGrio, "All that is a reason why this should come back to the forefront."

"That there is a rich history here at Pittsburgh, that innovation came from here. So many firsts came from here. And that is something that Black Pittsburgh and all of Pittsburgh should be just immensely proud of," said the Pittsburgh native.

Lee said of the modern-day attempts to rollback progress for Black Americans, "We have to push back at every single level, and it cannot just be marginalized people who are pushing back with us."

"If Trump can get away with doing this to our community and everyone else turns a blind eye, that's the beginning, that's authoritarianism grows. So we need more people to push back at every single level of this," she added. "If you care anything about the country, you have to recognize that that is an attack on you too."