

Key Terms and Concepts for Understanding EMS

Emergency Medical Service – EMS is a service essential to public health and safety. When someone is experiencing a health emergency in the home, at work or school, on the road, or anywhere else, they expect to receive timely and capable emergency medical services when 911 is called. Reliable ambulance services are a public health imperative – literally a matter of life or death.

Ulster County's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) landscape is a mix of fire department first responders (non-transport), Basic Life Support (BLS) agencies that can be volunteer-based, a combination of volunteer and paid, or paid organizations; and Advanced Life Support (ALS) agencies, which can be municipal or commercial.

A new law has expanded emergency medical services (EMS) reimbursement beyond traditional hospital emergency room transport. The legislation, Senator Hinchey's bill S8486C, now allows EMS providers to receive compensation for a broader range of medical services. This includes reimbursement for on-scene treatment, transportation to alternative healthcare facilities like urgent care centers and mental health clinics, and telemedicine consultation services. The law represents a significant shift in how emergency medical services are funded, providing more flexibility for patient care and treatment options.

Basic Life Support (BLS) – BLS practitioners (EMTs) are trained to handle a variety of patient symptoms, illnesses and injuries, including bleeding, falls/trauma, childbirth, choking, using equipment such as oxygen administration, Automated external defibrillator – (AED), splinting, and bandages & tourniquets. Though it is not a requirement, they may also be trained in the use of “adjuncts,” such as epi-pens, aspirin, albuterol, continuous positive airway pressure, (CPAP) and may perform blood glucometry, obtain automatically diagnostic 12-lead ECG's, and use supraglottic airways.

Advanced Life Support (ALS) – Advanced Life Support practitioners (paramedics) are trained to perform all of functions of an EMT and receive additional training and

education to start and maintain intravenous (IV) or intraosseous (IO) fluid administration, administer advanced medications to treat a variety of conditions, provide advanced respiratory care, such as endotracheal intubation and surgical airways, diagnose 12-lead ECG's and treat cardiac rhythm disorders, manage and oversee care for patients in cardiac arrest, treat life-threatening traumatic injuries, provide pain management, and diagnose acute stroke symptoms. In Ulster County about 65% of the calls dispatched are for ALS.

Primary Public Safety Answer Point (PSAP) – This is the Ulster County 911 Center, a consolidated dispatch center for police, fire, and EMS that handles emergency calls and coordinates emergency responses. For EMS calls, 911 telecommunicators use Emergency Medical Dispatch protocols to categorize the incident as requiring either BLS or ALS.

Mutual Aid – The organized, supervised, coordinated, cooperative, reciprocal assistance in which the personnel, equipment, and physical facilities of all participating EMS agencies, regardless of type or size, are utilized to meet peak demand or extraordinary resource utilization for EMS or other emergencies in which the services of EMS personnel would be used throughout Ulster and adjacent counties.

Municipal Certificate of Need (Muni-CON) – Muni-CON is a process defined in NY State Public Health Law Article 30, section 3008 (7-a), whereby a municipality, after passing local authority, establishes an ambulance service. The County Legislature in March 2025 authorized the Department of Emergency Services to apply for a Muni-CON.

NYS Ambulance Service Operating Certificate (ASOC) – To establish ambulance or advanced life support service (ALS-FR) in New York State the provider agency must possess certification issued by New York State – Division of State Emergency Medical Services DoSEMS. Issuance of a NYS Ambulance Service Operating Certificate (ASOC) authorizes an organization to provide services. This certification will be issued at either the BLS, ALS, or ALS-First Responder level and is issued for a specific geographic territory.