

ULSTER COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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May 21, 2024

Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins
188 State Street
Legislative Office Building, Room 907
Albany, NY 12247

Dear Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins,

We write to you because our Emergency Medical Services are in crisis and you have three bills before you that together provide solutions to this crisis and will help ensure the sustainability and reliability of these critical health care services across New York State. We urge you to pass these bills before the end of session and provide a pathway for our communities to navigate out of this crisis.

Ulster County, like many counties across the state, is facing a dire situation when it comes to ensuring adequate ambulance availability for its residents. Over the years, there has been a severe decline in available ambulance units and alarmingly long response times, putting lives at risk.

The county is served by a total of 20 Emergency Medical Agencies responding to an average of 23,000 EMS calls per year, but a staggering 50% of them fail to respond to calls for emergency medical assistance between 7% and 55% of the time. Relying on mutual aid from neighboring agencies is no longer a viable solution, as these agencies themselves are struggling to provide adequate service to their own communities.

It has become a distressing norm for it to take over 15 minutes to find an ambulance to respond from the time someone calls 911 for help. In some cases, the wait has been excruciatingly long, with families forced to transport their loved ones to the Emergency Room themselves due to severe delays lasting an hour or more.

Holidays and weekends are particularly challenging, with instances where no ambulances are available within the county. During these critical times, the Emergency Communications Center (911) must search high and low for an ambulance from other counties to respond as mutual aid, further increasing response times and potentially jeopardizing patient outcomes. With our County's demographic expected to continue to increase in age, the gap between demands for service and local agencies' ability to meet those demands will only grow.

The primary reasons for the gap here and elsewhere is a steady decline in volunteers, the low wages that many EMS agencies are able to provide, and escalating costs and inadequate

reimbursement rates for ambulance service. In short, we have an unworkable financial model in this state for these critical healthcare services.

Three bills that have been introduced in the State Senate and Assembly can put EMS on a more sustainable path. **S.4020-C (Mayer)/A.3392-C (Otis)** would appropriately designate EMS as an essential service, like police and fire, that must be provided, and enables county and local governments to establish a special taxing district to cover the costs of operations. **S.5000 (May)/A.4077 (Lupardo)** is an important companion bill that removes EMS services from the real property tax cap, allowing local municipalities to expand and better support their local EMS services. Without this exemption, many counties and municipalities will face major hurdles in establishing a special taxing district. Finally, **S.8486 (Hinchey)/A.9102 (Kelles)** would enable Medicaid reimbursement for treatment by EMTs and paramedics on site, as well as for transport to an urgent care clinic and mental health or rehabilitation facility. The current system of reimbursement only for transport to hospitals is nonsensical in rural areas, adds unnecessary costs, and delays appropriate treatment.

As our Senate Leader, you have the opportunity to fix persistent issues with a vital component of health care. Without a strong, healthy EMS system, our residents will continue to be put at risk of not receiving emergency medical care. We urge you to expeditiously pass these bills so that our communities can take the necessary steps to ensure sustainable and resilient Emergency Medical Service now and in the future.

Sincerely,



Jen Metzger
County Executive



Peter Criswell
Chair of the Ulster County Legislature



Gina Hansut
Chair, Law Enforcement and Public Safety Committee



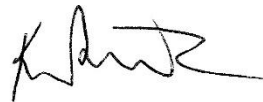
Megan Sperry
Deputy Chair of the Ulster County Legislature



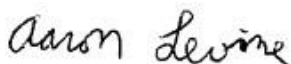
Deputy Chair, Law Enforcement and Public Safety Committee



Abe Uchitelle
Majority Leader, Ulster County Legislature



Kevin Roberts
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Aaron Levine
Deputy Majority Leader, Ulster County Legislature