

STEUBEN COUNTY PUBLIC SAFETY & CORRECTIONS COMMITTEE

Special Meeting

Thursday, July 14, 2022

Legislative Chambers, 3rd Floor, Annex Building

Bath, New York

****MINUTES****

COMMITTEE: John V. Malter, Chair Jeffrey P. Horton, Vice Chair Wendy Lozo
Frederick G. Potter

STAFF: Jack K. Wheeler Christopher Brewer Jennifer Prossick
Brenda Scotchmer Tim Marshall Ken Forenz
Tina Goodwin Ed Fitzpatrick

LEGISLATORS: Kelly H. Fitzpatrick Carol A. Ferratella James Kuhl
Hilda T. Lando Gary D. Swackhamer

ABSENT: K. Michael Hanna

OTHERS: Frederick Grambs, Springwater-Wayland EMS
Randy Housel, Tuscarora Ambulance
Misty Moore, Greenwood Ambulance
Daniel LeClone, Greenwood Ambulance
Ryan Bixby, Greenwood Ambulance
Holly Woodworth, Avoca Ambulance
Don Lewis, Canisteo Fire Department
Barb Hyman, Jasper Ambulance
Scott Hyman, Jasper Ambulance
Zach Hyman, Jasper Ambulance
Michelle Peacock, Bath Ambulance
Morgan Pierce, Bath Ambulance
Michael Hann, Bath Ambulance
Jaime Covert, Prattsburgh Ambulance
James Neary, AMR
Cole Slayton, Avoca Ambulance
Darren Ollis, Hammondsport Ambulance
Teri Symonds, Woodhull Ambulance
Arnold Champlain, Addison Ambulance
Mary Perham

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Malter called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

II. GENERAL BUSINESS

A. **EMS Discussion** – Mr. Malter stated the purpose of tonight’s meeting is to discuss the EMS study. Mr. Marshall stated we do not have a set agenda and introduced the ambulance corps members in attendance. Most of those in attendance have been following the minutes and discussions that we have had with regard to the EMS situation in the County. The EMS study was done in 2021 and the purpose was to identify those agencies that were struggling with EMS and to look at solutions to help get ambulances out the door. This discussion started back in 2016 and the resulting study was conducted in 2020 and 2021. Since the completion of the study, we have held meetings to educate the Legislature on the importance of EMS services in the county.

Mr. Marshall asked the corps members in attendance to discuss the struggles they are having and how they are creatively working together to meet the needs of the community.

Barb Hyman introduced herself as the Captain of the Jasper Ambulance Corps. We have 3 EMT's; me, my husband and my brother. If we are out of town, the call goes to mutual aid and that is difficult to get. She noted the other days they were already on a call and it took mutual aid 45 minutes to respond to a call. She and her brother own a business and during the day we try to go on the calls. We also help our neighboring communities when we can. Mr. Marshall commented they have an automatic mutual aid between Jasper, Troupsburg and Woodhull. Ms. Hyman stated I don't think we have an agreement signed for automatic mutual aid. We are on Troupsburg because they only have one or two EMT's and if there is a higher need we get called. Cameron only has 1 EMT and Canisteo has a number of EMT's.

Mr. Marshall commented at the previous meeting Mr. Lewis had mentioned that a large chunk of the mutual aid calls on Canisteo's behalf were due to their ambulance being out of service. He stated the biggest area of concern for him is the southern valley from Greenwood to Addison. The concern is the number of volunteers available during the day as well as the number of EMT's in each of those ambulance corps.

Teri Symonds stated she is from the Woodhull Ambulance Corps. We just finished a class in March and had two of our EMT's take the exam and pass. We have another EMT that is yet to test. I think we are doing better; last month we had 10 calls and answered 10 calls. We are putting a PowerPoint presentation together for our Town Board, but because of the flooding, there is not money available to help with recruiting EMT's. Everyone is trying harder to cover the calls and all we can do is take it call by call.

Mr. Marshall noted the Jasper Corps is under the fire department. Ms. Hyman replied yes and the town collects taxes for the fire district. Mr. Marshall asked is Woodhull a fire district ambulance as well? Ms. Symonds replied yes. We are incorporated and we carry our own CON.

Mr. Malter asked do you receive reimbursement from third party billing? Addison Fire Service replied a bill was just passed regarding that, however, we have three volunteers and if we have to do the billing on top of that, we are not interested. Mr. Marshall stated Woodhull does not bill.

Ms. Fitzpatrick commented the new law allows fire departments to bill for ambulance services and that is horrifying. If they run BLS and decide not to bill, then the charge goes to the fire department. Mr. Wheeler commented this was a surprise. It was presented as a good thing that the fire districts and municipalities could bill for services, but the ALS requirement makes it very difficult. Ms. Fitzpatrick stated if you want the ability to bill, you have to contract with an ALS provider. It is a typical New York State non-solution to a problem. Mr. Marshall commented this also requires you to use a third party biller and they charge a set amount per bill.

Ms. Symonds commented this is driving BLS out of service and puts our patients at risk. The volunteers probably will not call ALS and just hope they can get to the hospital before calling for an ALS unit. This is horrible for patients and rural EMS. This is not a good solution. Mr. Marshall stated I don't know why some of the legislation was written as it was. It was written to most of the time, benefit some association or agency. Ms. Prossick stated I feel bad as many of these districts do not have an attorney. It will take a lot of interpretation, organization and legal guidance. Mr. Marshall stated the recommendation we are giving agencies is to contact their legal counsel and get them involved.

Misty Moore stated she is from Greenwood Ambulance. We have two new EMT's. All of our EMT's are older and now it is just me and it helps having two more. We are running into the same problems. It is not necessarily mutual aid as we can do most of our calls and we try to help others, but we don't always have a driver. Mr. Marshall asked how many EMT's do you have? Ms. Moore replied we have 3 active. Mr. Marshall asked are you fire based and funded by the township? Ms. Moore replied we are funded by the Town of West Union as we cover that district as well. Mr. Marshall noted that West Union has split coverage with Independence Ambulance out of Allegany County. He noted Greenwood is fire department based.

Jaime Covert stated she is from Prattsburgh Ambulance. We are fire department based and receive funding from the town. Additionally we try to do fundraisers. She stated we have a total of 9 EMT's. Myself and another EMT have our own business and our homes are close to the station and we try hard to be available 24 hours. We have 2 very dedicated drivers. We try to not mutual aid our calls unless we really have to.

Mr. Marshall noted that Prattsburgh swaps calls quite a bit with Pulteney when they are short-handed and they cover most of that area. A small portion of Prattsburgh is covered by Naples Ambulance out of Ontario County. Some areas of the county are so large that outside jurisdictions are covering portions of our County.

Mr. Wheeler asked does the Prattsburgh district cover Ingleside? Ms. Covert replied yes and at times Italy Valley. Sometimes Yates County comes into our district, as does Avoca and Wheeler. Mr. Wheeler asked how does it work if a call comes to our 911 Center but technically it is outside of where your district covers, but inside the County; does that automatically dispatch to Ontario? Mr. Marshall replied yes, we have that configured on the CAD system.

Cole Slayton stated he is the Captain of Avoca Ambulance. We have 4 EMT's with 2 currently active, including me. We make one-third of our calls as all of our EMT's are truck drivers. We are very fortunate with our neighbors as they help cover our calls. We are under the Village Fire Department and we are not in much trouble financially; we are just trying to get people to join.

Ms. Hyman commented some people take the classes but do not take the test, which they have to go to Rochester for. We put the training into them and lose them. Mr. Malter commented the reimbursement from NYS is not coming to you as they did not pass. Ms. Hyman stated we had to pay for the books. Ms. Covert stated some of our volunteer EMT's took the test and then left to go to a paid agency. Mr. Marshall stated we are starting to see that more with the volunteers. AMR picks up a lot of their EMT's from the local corps. Hornell City has reported picking up more members from the volunteer corps. With Prattsburgh, their members often go to Canandaigua, Penn Yan and Middlesex which are all paid agencies. Ms. Covert stated that does hurt us and it makes it hard to keep people.

Mr. Marshall stated Ms. Symonds is an instructor for EMT courses and works out of St. James. We also have classes through EMSTAR. He asked Ms. Symonds to talk about the training courses, length, etc. Ms. Hyman stated the courses start in September and end in March. Ms. Symonds stated there are a lot of struggles. There are the financial struggles because most of the volunteers have to pay for gas to drive to take the course. The course starts end of August early September and the test is in March or April. This is 162 hours plus 10 clinical hours. They receive a textbook and a workbook and they have to take large exams throughout the course and then the State exam. There is also practical testing before you sit down for the written exam. They recently opened up a different test site and now there are testing sites in Rochester, Corning, Ithaca and Syracuse. To test you need to call and schedule the test and there is a \$28.00 testing fee. Once you arrive at the testing site, you sit for the exam and they tell you whether you pass or fail. If you pass, you are valid for three years and then you have to start the process all over again. Ms. Symonds stated the State gives \$200 for those students that volunteer, but that is not nearly enough. This is not an easy exam and students have repeatedly taken and failed the exam. It is very difficult once you take and pass the exam as there is not an experienced EMT to help to get you through the hurdles of being a new EMT. This is a big undertaking. We run one course per year. With the new billing law, that will drive everyone away and I don't know where our patients will go for help.

Mr. Malter asked how many hours is the recertification? Ms. Symonds replied 162 hours plus 10 clinical hours. You have to recertify every three years unless you do the CME Program. With the CME Program that is another educational course and you have to go to class and still take testing after that. However, with that you can do that over a three-year period. We have such limited resources for the CME program and it is difficult to do. Mr. Marshall commented a lot of the online courses are very much internet based and for some of our volunteers they are not in areas with good broadband to be able to watch the videos. Those in areas with poor service or dial-up don't have the capability for that. Ms. Symonds stated before you can do the CME you have to be approved by the State and your medical director. They are very challenging courses to get through to begin with.

Arnold Champlain stated he is with Addison Fire/Ambulance – We have the same problems as everyone else. We get paid by the town, not the village. We have 2 EMT's that run all of our calls and nobody wants to stay because of everything they have to go through to become an EMT or get recertified.

Dan Ollis stated he is with the Hammondsport Ambulance through the Fire Department. We are looking into getting our CON to do calls in those cases where the fire department can respond. Our ambulance corps is not able to get a crew out. He noted that he primarily runs with Bath Ambulance. Mr. Marshall stated Hammondsport Fire Department is looking to get their first responder certification to help out.

Mr. Malter asked what is the pay for EMT's? Ms. Peacock stated for Bath Ambulance we start a new EMT at \$16.00 per hour. Mr. Marshall asked how many EMT's do you have? Ms. Peacock replied we have a paid staff with 8 paid EMT's and 1 volunteer EMT. Ms. Fitzpatrick asked is that the going rate or are you paying better? Ms. Peacock replied we are one of the better paying agencies. Mr. Malter asked when they are going through class or recertification, do you reimburse for the hours they put in? Ms. Peacock stated for a new volunteer we sponsor and pay for them to go through the program and put them on the roster as a volunteer. The cost for going to class is their cost, but we pay for books and courses. They are not on our payroll until they are an EMT.

Mr. Malter asked do you receive reimbursement for that cost? Ms. Peacock replied we have been approved by the State and instead we do it through the CME Program and do the recertification online. Mr. Malter asked since you have been able to do it on line, what service do you use? Ms. Peacock replied this is an all online program and we go through Vital Signs. If someone chooses to go in-person, we will pay and they will get the CME credits. They also have the option to do it online. Mr. Marshall explained State Department of Health provides online training through Vital Signs. They hold a large conference in the fall, typically in Syracuse, Buffalo or Albany.

Ms. Covert stated we cannot pay for all of our EMT's to go. We are part of the CME Program as well. Mr. Malter asked at the conference can you take the classes for recertification? Ms. Covert replied we sponsor training through EMSTAR. The Vital Signs conference is \$275.00 per person, plus hotel stay. That gets you most of the core CME that you need to recertify. I think it is much better. Mr. Marshall stated the conference starts on Thursday and goes through Sunday. Fred (Spring-Way) stated we participate in CME. It is 45 hours over a three-year period. We use this as a benefit to recruit members.

Mr. Swackhamer asked how many active EMT's do we have in the County? Mr. Marshall replied that is the big question. I presented the number we had from a list from Department of Health at our first meeting. These are the struggles. People will get their certification but they don't necessarily run a lot of calls. They do it for their career to get a full-time job. There are many EMT's that are with the volunteer fire departments that do not run ambulances. With the first responder unit they have an EMT that runs as a first responder, but would not run with the ambulance corps or with a transporting agency. We also have EMT's in our County register but they don't work in our County; they work in Rochester or Elmira. The active number of EMT's would be difficult to come up with, but we could poll our agencies.

Ms. Hyman commented another issue is that it takes time to run a call. From Jasper, it is at least two hours. Mr. Marshall stated any high level call is going to Sayre or Arnot which adds additional time. If it is a trauma call, the nearest trauma center is either Sayre or Rochester.

Mr. Neary from AMR stated the number of EMT's that are coming over from fire service/volunteer service is a surprise to us too and I don't know how accurate that is. We will need to look into that further. With regard to billing, currently when we jump on board a non-billing agency and do a transport, before they leave, we are able to directly bill the patient's insurance. With the ambulance as a billing agency, there can be only one bill and that is a transporting service so we have to directly bill the patient for our services. A billing agency can bill unless there is a transport agreement. Right now that is the volunteers. With regard to staffing, the paid organizations are taking EMT's from you and that used to be the case in the past and most of our EMT's continued to serve their communities. Now days, with life, that has changed and our pool of EMT's do not come from the volunteer agencies. We have started our Earn While You Learn Program and our hope is that our EMT's will become more active in their communities. Mr. Neary stated there is a testing facility in Rochester and now they have a location in Corning. There is also an option to test online, but the rules to do that are a

nightmare. The preference is to go to the testing locations. Our people try to go to the Corning location, however, they can only accept so many students. Some of our people have had to drive to Binghamton or Albany to test.

Mr. Malter asked with the State testing site in Corning is there any way to persuade them to increase capacity? Mr. Neary replied Corning Community College runs that testing site. That is a good question. With the at-home testing option you have to go through a lot of hoops and I don't know of anyone that has chosen to go that route. Mr. Malter asked how is the testing done at Corning Community College? Mr. Neary replied they have computers that you are testing on. Ms. Fitzpatrick asked is it a timed test? Mr. Neary replied you have 3 hours. Ms. Symonds commented the test is quite difficult. Mr. Neary stated the Vital Signs conference this year will be held in Albany. We pay for the initial fees and then the hotel fees. You have to go for two years and that is not an easy method.

Ms. Symonds stated she would like to thank everyone that has tried to help their communities and take the EMT course. We appreciate any help that we can get. Mr. Marshall stated absolutely and from the County side we do our best to try to work with the agencies to get the best resources to the patients as quickly as we can. The agencies with paid staff are making a lot of sacrifices to go help their neighbors. It is becoming a domino effect and we are rapidly reaching the tipping point.

Mike from Bath Ambulance stated we are seeing more hardcore overdoses and for our volunteers it is difficult to get them safely transported to the hospital. It is very difficult and our volunteers don't want to deal with that anymore. There are a few older members that don't want to get hit. The types of calls we are doing now are scary. Mr. Marshall stated you go from the extreme of those types of calls to the calls from people that could go to urgent care, but because they don't have transportation they call the ambulance.

Mr. Malter stated I would like to thank everyone for coming and thank you for all that you do. Thank you for your service. We will be having another meeting to pull this all together and try to come up with a plan to help the ambulance services and provide the County with better service. Hopefully in a couple more months we will have some answers for you. He stated that he believes the next meeting will be with the supervisors and mayors. Mr. Wheeler stated yes we will plan our next meeting for August.

Mr. Malter adjourned the meeting at 7:28 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted by

Amanda L. Chapman
Deputy Clerk
Steuben County Legislature