



Consider legislation to improve response and care

The Assembly Health and Senior Services Committee met Thursday to discuss the quality and delivery of emergency medical services in New Jersey and legislation (A-2095) which is designed to improve response and care.

Among those who testified were representatives from the New Jersey Chapter of the American College of Emergency Physicians, the New Jersey Hospital Association, the New Jersey Council of Teaching Hospitals, the Monmouth-Ocean Hospital Service Corporation, the New Jersey Association of Paramedic Programs and the Health Care Quality Institute.

"Emergency medical services are among the most fundamental functions we can provide as a government," Assemblyman Herb Conaway (D-Burlington), the committee chairman, said. "If we are going to overhaul our system, it's important that we do it right. Today was an important first step in gaining crucial feedback from those who are directly involved in providing critical emergency services."

According to a 2007 report that was issued after an analysis was conducted at the behest of the Legislature, New Jersey's two-tiered EMS system is in a "state of near crisis" due to the system's financial structure, decline in volunteer membership, lack of comprehensive legislation and a weakened Advanced Life Support system. The bill incorporates many of the recommendations from the report.

Under the bill, the state Department of Health and Senior Services' Office of Emergency Medical Services, would serve as the lead state agency in overseeing emergency medical services to ensure the continuous and timely availability and dispatch of basic and advanced life support through ground and air, adult and pediatric triage, treatment and transport and emergency response capabilities.

Among the bill's chief components is a provision that would grant municipalities official authority over EMS in their jurisdiction, as is customary now for police and fire services. The bill would require a minimum of two emergency medical technicians (EMTs) as the standard of care for every ambulance in the state. Every city and town would also have two years to arrange for the provision of basic life support services in response to 911 calls prior to hospital care. The Department of Health and Human Services would also be responsible for arranging advanced life support services in response to 911 calls statewide.

The bill would create a more inclusive EMS Training Fund to train all providers to meet their certification requirements in order to ensure that all emergency services personnel receive the best education. The measure would require paramedics, EMTs, and emergency medical responders to obtain a license from DHSS and undergo a criminal history background check as a condition of licensure or other authorization to practice. The health commissioner would also have the authority to revoke the license for violation of certain laws and regulations. The bill would also consolidate numerous groups, task forces and advisory boards, into one governing body — Emergency Medical Care Advisory Board (EMCAB) — to advise DHSS on pre-hospital issues, medical care and the establishment of provider standards.

"This legislation would institute various measures that will revolutionize services, making them more efficient and effective, while streamlining the system to save taxpayer dollars," Assemblyman Angle Fuentes (D-Camden), a co-sponsor, said.

"This is an important measure because it provides a uniform standard for responding to emergencies and treating and transporting patients. The ultimate goal is to ensure proper care for all of our residents," Assemblywoman Eleese Evans (D-Passaic), another sponsor, said.

"In order to deliver the very finest in care, our emergency personnel deserve the very finest in education," Assemblywoman Joan Quigley (D-Hudson), a co-sponsor, added.

The panel also considered legislation (A-1993) sponsored by Conaway that would establish procedures for the operation of air ambulance services.

— *TOM HESTER SR., NEWJERSEYNEWSROOM.COM*