



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

Blankenbush, Ritchie, Fort Drum Representatives Ask Lieutenant Governor Duffy to Locate Air Med Service at Drum

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Assemblyman Ken Blankenbush, Senator Patty Ritchie and representatives from Fort Drum today met with Lieutenant Governor Robert Duffy and New York State Police representatives to make the case for locating an Air Medical Services helicopter at Fort Drum. The meeting was arranged by the governor's office at the request of Assemblyman Blankenbush.

The meeting came just hours before the Senate was expected to pass Senator Ritchie's bill S.4712, legislation that will cut red tape to help recruit a commercial air ambulance service to Northern New York to provide the north country with another option in its efforts to provide an medical air evacuation service to the region.

“Fort Drum continues to grow, and with that growth, so does the population of Northern New York, and unfortunately, the number of traumatic incidents,” Blankenbush said. “It has become essential for this region to have air medical service. Transporting critically injured patients to Syracuse by ground compromises precious life-saving time and burdens already strained local volunteer EMS providers.”

“I have been urging the state to locate one of its medical evacuation helicopters to Northern New York where it could be used to transport people who suffer critical injuries. I know from personal experience what it can be like to spend hours transporting a critically injured patient to trauma centers when minutes can make all the difference,” Senator Ritchie said. “It could also be used to assist with search and rescue, homeland security efforts along the border, drug investigations and assistance to area law enforcement agencies.”

Other attendees at the meeting included Fort Drum Garrison Commander Col. Noel T. Nicolle, Deputy Commander for Fort Drum Medical Activity Lt. Kyle Patterson, Fort Drum Garrison Command Sergeant Major CSM John McNeirney, Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization (FDRHPO) Executive Director Denise Young, Fort Drum Department of Planning Community Planner Michael Richardson, and Assemblywoman Addie Russell.

During the meeting, the lieutenant governor reaffirmed the state’s commitment to Fort Drum and the region. He also expressed his understanding of the special nature of the region and the need for closer air medical service. State police representatives they would evaluate the state police’s resources to determine the viability of locating an air medical helicopter in Jefferson County.

“In light of our growing population, it has become critical that air medical capability be secured for the North Country. We salute Assemblyman Blankenbush’s and Senator Ritchie’s leadership to engage the governor’s office in a solution,” Young said.

In 2007, the Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization established a committee to identify the impact of the loss of service of the Military Assistance to Safety and Traffic (MAST) air medical program to the northern New York region. Partnering with the Fort Drum Garrison Command, local stakeholders identified that air medical services is a critical link in the region’s emergency medical service

(EMS). Fort Drum Regional Health Planning has been seeking Air Medical Services to ensure that the tens of thousands of soldiers who train annually on the installation, and the 160,000 military and civilian residents of the Fort Drum region, can be transported to the nearest Level 1 trauma center, 70 miles away, in the time necessary to save the lives of trauma victims.

According to the recent census, Jefferson County has one of the fastest growing populations in the state. The county also has both the lowest median age of any county in New York state and a larger ratio of male to female than any other county. Research has shown that younger populations and males are more prone to traumatic injury requiring immediate access to appropriate healthcare.

Recently completed Center for Disease Control (CDC) research concluded that 18-54 year olds transported to trauma centers by ground instead of air have a 39% greater risk of death. The nearest Level 1 trauma center is located in Syracuse, 70 miles from Watertown. Ground transport from Jefferson County averages over an hour, significantly delaying the delivery of life-saving care.

The MAST mission assigned to Fort Drum was removed from service, effective May 2007. MAST provided air medical support to emergency incidents across Jefferson, Lewis and St. Lawrence counties averaging a minimum of 60 transports of critically injured persons annually. Since that time, calls for air medical service have continued to increase with over 120 transports made by air medical in 2010 that had to be called in from outside the region, significantly increasing the time to receive definitive care. Additionally, MAST provided search and rescue support in the region for an average of 30 incidents each year.

In 2010, Jefferson County alone accounted for more than 27% of the call volume for the 14 county region served by the Aeromedical Clearinghouse. The four counties that make up this corridor, Jefferson, Lewis, St. Lawrence and Oswego, accounted for over 55% of the calls in 2010.

The Department of the Army has expressed a willingness to partner with the State Police to develop a mutually beneficial air medical evacuation service located at the Wheeler Sack Army Airfield.