



Testimony of:

United New York Ambulance Network (UNYAN)

on the

**FY 2023-24 New York State Executive Budget Proposal
Health & Mental Hygiene
Article VII Bill**

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

Albany, New York

Presented by:

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Introduction

My name is Jeffrey Call, and I am chairman of the United New York Ambulance Network (UNYAN), and general manager of Guilfoyle Ambulance Service Inc. UNYAN is a professional trade association representing more than 40 commercial and not-for-profit ambulance providers across New York State, from Long Island to Watertown, from Albany to Buffalo, and everywhere in between. Our mission is to promote the delivery of high-quality and timely emergency medical care in a cost-effective manner whenever and wherever our members are called upon to provide emergency medical services (EMS). The association views pre-hospital care as a critical component of the entire medical care system and values the integral services that allow communities to receive access to quality, affordable, and advanced aid when it matters the most.

UNYAN members are on the front lines of the front lines, playing a vital role in public health and safety services across New York State. They have always been essential workers — long before the pandemic. In addition to responding to 50% of all the essential lifesaving 911 emergency calls, our members handle the majority of non-emergency calls in the state. While these services do not get as much attention, they are equally important to New York's healthcare system.

Without the non-emergency care and transport services that UNYAN members provide, the delivery of overall healthcare services would be severely disrupted. The issue of overcrowded and under-staffed hospitals, nursing homes, and clinics since the onset of the pandemic would only worsen. The overcrowding and staffing issues that plague our emergency departments would also be exacerbated, due to an inability to effectively and efficiently move patients out. Likewise, essential access to approved and prescribed medical care would be significantly limited.

Ambulance service providers have been dealing with the same workforce shortage and budget issues as other sectors in healthcare. On top of that, the industry has been faced with years of inadequate Medicaid funding, putting many operators in peril.

We are grateful to Governor Kathy Hochul for including EMS in the Executive Budget Proposal, including initiatives recommended by the State Emergency Medical Services Council (SEMSCO) to modernize EMS. These changes, such as an expanded definition of EMS and training, recruitment and retention programs, have been sought after by our members for several years. We are eager to see them in the enacted FY 2023-24 New York State budget.

Our services go beyond just transporting a neighbor in need to a hospital in an emergency. Expanding the definition of EMS reflects the reality of our work, especially during the pandemic and now post-pandemic. Additionally, there is a severe EMS personnel shortage, and help getting and keeping workers in EMS is a necessity. Modernized EMS training, recruitment and retention programs will greatly help our providers.

Changes to CON and Creation of Regional EMS Districts — Oppose

We support all of Part S except changes to Certificate of Need, or CON (section 3008), and the creation of regional EMS districts (section 3033).

The changes to the process for accepting and approving Certificate of Need (CON) applications for EMS agencies as reflected in Section 9, subsection 3008, are premature and have not been fully vetted by EMS stakeholders. SEMSCO has assigned a team to review and issue recommendations for updating and streamlining the CON process. The committee tasked with this will deliver those recommendations to SEMSCO. We would appreciate that this process continues at the SEMSCO level, without changes in the state budget, to reflect the insight and input of those EMS industry stakeholders.

On February 8, 2023, SEMSCO voted unanimously to request that the state remove Section 11, subsection 3033 of Part S, A3007/S4007, to create regional EMS districts. The proposal eschews the regional input of the 19 Regional Emergency Medical Services Councils (REMSCO), which each consist of 31 professionals from all types of ambulance agencies and hospitals, including physicians, nurses and other allied health workers that are fully vetted by the Commissioner of Health and committed to the successful delivery of EMS in every region. These stakeholders have a decades-long, proven track record of commitment to New York State and the delivery of EMS. The Executive Budget Proposal to create regional EMS districts would add a layer to the EMS delivery system that disenfranchises the untiring commitment of the REMSCOs and would be a burden on our members and the delivery of EMS.

Mobile Integrated Healthcare — Support

UNYAN has worked to support mobile integrated healthcare, also known as community paramedicine, for many years. These types of programs, which utilize the resources of EMS to deliver care whenever and wherever needed, are already happening around the state and country. Mobile integrated healthcare was paramount to deliver on the executive orders of COVID-19, especially to allow for vaccinations and for on-site treatment when facilities were not accepting patients. These programs more commonly occur now within the closed systems of hospital networks, funded by waivers and grants. These programs are essential to helping patients and reducing costly trips to emergency departments.

We are not interested in going outside our scope, but simply interested in serving our patients when they need it and helping to keep them out of emergency departments. Engaging in mobile integrated healthcare, and being reimbursed for it, can help offset the cost of readiness in EMS. In other words, EMS professionals could provide these services while waiting for emergencies, which could reduce the cost of maintaining a ready-to-respond environment. It would also contribute to employee retention. We urge you to consider this concept for inclusion in the FY 2023-24 state budget.

Creation of an Ambulance Provider Assessment

UNYAN members take pride in providing top-tier care to the communities they serve. Many of the communities our members serve are primarily covered by Medicaid or Medicare. For some of our UNYAN members, it is not unusual for 75% of their total call volume to be Medicaid and Medicare recipients. The rate at which the government reimburses ambulance companies for Medicaid-related calls is currently far below the actual cost of providing service, causing a financial strain on everyone in the industry.

As the system continues to expand, it is our top priority to make sure that the funding that our members receive also increases. We appreciate the Medicaid funds proposed in the executive

budget proposal for ambulance transportation. The administrative proposal will increase the rate Medicaid reimburses for more complex and involved ambulance service. It will be an immediate financial help for some providers. It will not increase the rates for basic life support, non-emergency transports. While we are grateful for the recognition that ambulance rates are inadequate, especially for complex cases, the \$13.7 million state share investment is not nearly enough.

Providers have long struggled with low reimbursement rates. Medicaid reimbursement typically covers only 65% of their cost per transport. While the New York State Department of Health increased Medicaid rates for EMS services in 2018, Medicaid rates remain as low as 30-40% of Medicare rates for comparable services.

We view the administrative rate change proposal as a short term, immediate help to some ambulance service providers. To ensure ongoing support for this life-saving industry, UNYAN is proposing a provider assessment to generate additional federal Medicaid funding for all non-governmental EMS providers at no cost to the state. A dozen states have passed legislation to create similar EMS assessment programs, which are instrumental in contributing to the financial stability of providers. The Department of Health can use these provider-supplied dollars to significantly increase federal funding coming into New York and use these new funds to support Medicaid rates for EMS providers.

This program has the potential to generate tens of millions of dollars annually in increased federal reimbursement for ambulance providers and will be budget-neutral for the state. Increased reimbursement can be used to enhance EMS service capacity, improve equipment, increase wages and provide training for EMTs, all at no additional costs to patients. EMS providers are willing to front the cost of the provider assessment for the good of the industry, the patients we serve and our employees.

We support the ambulance provider assessment bill language in S5122 Rivera/A##### McDonald.

Conclusion

On behalf of UNYAN members, I am honored to submit testimony for today's hearing. As we look to the year ahead, it is important to remember that UNYAN members represent an overwhelmingly cost-effective option for municipalities in New York to ensure that high-quality emergency medical care is provided for all residents. However, our workforce is in desperate need of financial support and improvement.

As frontline essential workers, UNYAN members will continue to serve the communities in which they operate to the best of their abilities, despite the many constraints they face. The future of our agencies remains at risk, and we are calling on the governor and the legislature to support and secure our budget and legislative priorities during the 2023 legislative session.

We look forward to continuing to work with Governor Hochul, Chairperson Paulin, Chairperson Weinstein, Chairperson Rivera, Chairperson Krueger, and all members of the New York State Assembly and Senate to ensure our members receive the critical resources needed to continue doing their jobs safely and effectively, delivering the best possible outcomes for patients across the state.

Thank you.

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