



Hopatcong Ambulance Squad

PO Box 334, Hopatcong, NJ 07843
Phone (973)770-0440 Fax (973)810-5589
www.HopatcongEMS.org

March 22, 2022

Commissioner Judith M. Persichilli
State of New Jersey
Department of Health
PO Box 360
Trenton, NJ 08625-0360

Dear Commissioner Persichilli;

We are writing to you in response to the letter that was shared with us on the denial for the request to create a waiver for the 2 EMT crewmember requirements. We understand that there are now complications created by the passing of A6073 and are asking that you partner with the Senators to take immediate action to repeal the paragraph "d" from that legislature as it is negatively impacting the ability for ambulance squads across the state to respond to 9-1-1 emergencies while we are all still being impacted by EMT shortages.

When Senator Vitale and Assemblyman Verrelli introduced the legislation, it was truly a benefit to EMS as it extended the 1 EMT and 1 Responder crew requirements through January 2023. This would give the ambulance squads devastated by EMT shortages due to COVID time to recruit and restaff as they are on a 2 year lag based on the pandemic. Unfortunately, when the legislation went to committee, it was changed and a paragraph "d" (below) added that negated the intent of the bill forcing 2 EMTs back on all 9-1-1 calls. Ambulance squads like Hopatcong and many others only respond to 9-1-1 calls so adding in the paragraph made the assistance the legislation was supposed to provide useless. We need your help and the help of all of the Senators getting this paragraph removed. Leaving this paragraph in is restricting the ability to answer calls putting patients at risk of not getting timely care. This could mean an ambulance is unavailable 3-4 nights a week. The 3 licensed agencies (Hopatcong, Lakeland, Sparta) in our area alone service 30,000+ residents.

29 ¹d. The provisions of subsection b. of this section shall not apply
30 to a basic life support vehicle dispatched in response to a 9-1-1
31 emergency call, which vehicles, when in service, shall be staffed by a
32 minimum of two emergency medical technicians.

Prior to COVID, Hopatcong Ambulance Squad successfully maintained the 2 EMT requirements without issue. When COVID struck all of EMS across the state and country was immediately impacted by staffing shortages. EMTs were in very high demand by all agencies and to avoid cross exposure EMTs were restricted either directly or indirectly from working or volunteering for outside agencies. 70% of the EMTs at Hopatcong Ambulance Squad work for another EMS agency such as a transport company, hospital, or dispatch center.

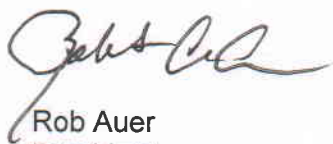
When the NJDOH waiver was put in place it was extremely helpful during times where we had staffing constraints due to exposures, etc. This waiver was using sparingly. This waiver also allowed us to split crews to be able to handle multiple calls at the same time. Last year alone there were 60+ occurrences where 2 or more ambulances out on 9-1-1 calls at the same time.

Near the end of 2021, COVID cases began to reduce, but overall 9-1-1 calls did not. Our call volume increased. Many of our patients had avoided calling for an ambulance during the pandemic in fear that emergency rooms were not the safest place to be.

Although all of us in EMS were elated to see the COVID numbers decrease, our hard work is far from over. EMS agencies have 2 years of recruiting to catch up on. So many people misunderstand where EMTs come from. EMTs are not just readily available in the market like some professions are. EMTs start as First Responders in volunteer squads where they are groomed and sponsored to take the EMT certification class. In a perfect scenario, it takes an average individual about a year to attain their EMT after signing up to volunteer. The key to this process is having a steady influx of volunteers. With COVID, that steady stream was cut off for 2 years. Volunteer ambulance squads are also the recruiting ground for other EMS agencies, transport companies, and hospital networks needing EMTs. These agencies are able to offer higher pay and incentives far beyond what a community based ambulance squad can compete with so there is a constant need to backfill.

There is a misconception that having one EMT and a qualified First Responder puts patients at risk. Keep in mind with a minimal crew of 2 someone must drive the ambulance. A First Responder would always be the one driving during a transport and the EMT is always the primary caregiver. That was accounted for in the new legislation as well. For advanced medical needs an ALS unit would be dispatched/requested the same as it is today. Again, the First Responder would still be the driver keeping the EMT with the Paramedic(s) providing continuous patient care.

We need your active support and partnership for an immediate resolution to this crewmember requirement issue before our communities suffer a tragedy from not getting timely care. We will also be reaching out to the public to inform our communities of the impacts of the new legislation to ask them to actively demand that paragraph "d" be repealed.



Rob Auer
President
Hopatcong Ambulance Squad
(201)317-7354
president@hopatcongems.org



Kai Crimando
Captain
Hopatcong Ambulance Squad
(973)770-0440
captain@hopatcongems.org

cc: Governor Phil Murphy
Senator Steven Oroho
Senator Anthony Bucco
Senator Joseph Vitale
Assemblyman Anthony Verrelli
Assemblyman Parker Space
Assemblyman Harold Wirths
NJ State League of Municipalities
Director, Board of Sussex County Commissioners Anthony Fasano
Sussex County Commissioner Sylvia Petillo
Hopatcong Mayor Michael Francis
Hopatcong Councilman Jennifer Johnson
Hopatcong Police Chief Meghan McClusky
Hopatcong Community Police Officer Taylor Gentner
Hopatcong OEM Wade Crowley
Hopatcong Fire Chief Esad (Steve) Kucevic
Chairperson, EMS Council of New Jersey 12th District Mary Hookway
Sussex County EMS Coordinator Doug Cook