



# New York State Volunteer Ambulance and Rescue Association, Inc.

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January 11, 2022

Kate Bliss  
Director  
Bureau of Health Access, Policy, and Innovation  
New York State Department of Health  
Corning Tower  
Albany, New York 12237

Dear Ms. Bliss,

Thank you for your response to our October 4, 2021 letter to Governor Hochul on Medicaid Rate Adequacy and Training Reimbursement. The New York State Volunteer Ambulance and Rescue Association (NYSVARA) thanks Governor Hochul and the Department of Health for the on-going efforts to ensure the safety of our emergency medical services (EMS) system and our communities, as we continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic. We are also very appreciative of the steps taken over the last several years to increase Medicaid ambulance rates.

We were very encouraged by Governor Hochul's commitment to EMS in her State of the State address. We strongly support making an investment in the state's health care workforce and infrastructure. NYSVARA has several state budget recommendations that are consistent with the Governor's address.

1. **One Additional Year of Medicaid Rate Increase** - As you mentioned in your October 26, letter, several years of Medicaid ambulance rate adjustments were made in response to the 2017 Medicaid Rate Adequacy Review, the last occurring in June 2021. We are appreciative of the incremental rate increases over five years. Since there were not enough funds available at the time of these adjustments to fully increase Medicaid rates to equal the cost of providing the service, **NYSVARA recommends that the Executive Budget contain a sixth year of Medicaid ambulance rates increases, equal to at least the average amount implemented in each of the last five years (approximately \$6.3 million). Given the current severe fiscal challenges facing EMS providers, we would request a one-year investment of \$10 million.** We ask that this be done while maintaining current Medicaid crossover payments for Medicare Part B coinsurance and supplemental Medicaid payments for ambulance providers.
2. **2022 Medicaid Rate Adequacy Review** - Much has changed since the 2017 Medicaid Rate Adequacy Review. The accumulated impacts of the workforce shortage, COVID-19, and other rising costs continues to financially challenge EMS agencies. Given the significant changes in the financial landscape since 2017, NYSVARA recommends that the Department of Health

conduct a 2022 Medicaid Rate Adequacy Review that can measure the accumulated impact of the last five years on ambulance organization fiscal sustainability. This would provide up-to-date data on whether additional financial adjustment is warranted.

3. **Training Reimbursement** - NYSVARA recommends that NYS Executive Budget proposal commit to funding 100% of the tuition and fees for a volunteer to complete EMT and AEMT training and receive NYS certification. We would also recommend the extension of this funding to EMT-P certification courses. This is consistent with the Governor's plan outline for "attracting a new generation of EMS providers through new EMS educational opportunities" and would be in addition to the "academy-style" EMS courses already being planned.

EMS agencies are struggling to recruit and train the volunteers that are the core of the emergency medical response system in many communities. Training volunteers is expensive and New York State has not increased the amount of money allocated for the training of a volunteer EMT for two decades. State reimbursement for EMT training has been unchanged at \$700, since prior to 2002. As a result, EMS squads or individual volunteers must shoulder an increasing portion of the cost of EMT training.

For example, a course sponsor could charge \$1,200 in tuition, plus a \$200 book fee, for an EMT class. New York State only contributes \$700 to that training, leaving the local EMS agency or student with responsibility for \$700 or 50% of the cost.

As you know, the number of EMS providers available to serve New York communities is decreasing at the same time that we see an increased demand for service due to aging communities, chronic care needs, drug and alcohol abuse, and behavioral health challenges. The Bureau of EMS recently reported that the number of EMS providers in NYS decreased by more than 15 percent between 2019 and 2021. In addition, in 2021 less than half of the certified providers appeared to be working in a paid or volunteer capacity, based-on data in patient care reports.

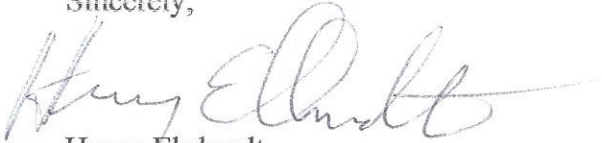
4. **Ensure That the EMS Workforce is Included in Wage Enhancements and Retention Bonuses** - We applaud Governor Hochul's commitment to invest in the health care workforce through wage enhancements and retention initiatives. We believe these initiatives should include career EMS personnel at both for-profit and not-for-profit EMS agencies throughout the state. It is important to note that many NYSVARA not-for-profit EMS agencies have both paid and volunteer EMS responders working side-by-side.
5. **Increase the Volunteer Ambulance Workers Tax Credit** - In 2007, the State Legislature and the Governor enacted a volunteer firefighters' and ambulance workers' tax credit (Section 606 of the NYS Tax Law). Active volunteer firefighters or volunteer ambulance workers are entitled to a state income tax credit of \$200. NYSVARA recommends that the tax credit be increased to at least \$500 annually, as retention initiatives are vital for both volunteer and paid EMS responders.



We thank you for consideration of these recommendations to address the low training reimbursement, volunteer and career retention, and the Medicaid payment gap to strengthen our EMS agencies and help us strengthen our workforce. Our volunteer members and our career EMS colleagues around the state report for duty every day. They give of themselves for their communities and these initiatives will support their continued service.

If you have any questions, please contact Legislative Chairperson Steven Kroll at [legislation@nysvara.org](mailto:legislation@nysvara.org) or (518) 376-7228.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Henry Ehrhardt". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Henry Ehrhardt  
President