

Schumer supports ambulance funding

By Robert J. McCarthy NEWS POLITICAL REPORTER

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Officials from ambulance services across New York State gathered behind Sen. Charles E. Schumer in Buffalo on Monday to highlight what they called inadequate Medicare reimbursement rates for emergency responders and to support his new bill to hike them.

“If our ambulances don’t get the help they need we’re going to find that the death rate will go up and the illness rate will go up,” he said. “It’s that simple.”

Schumer said Medicare has “lowballed” ambulance services based on a national fee schedule implemented in 2002. He

The senator appeared at Rural/ Metro Medical Services headquarters on William Gaiter Parkway to urge the federal government to recognize that current rates fall 6 percent below the cost of providing services for the 40 percent of ambulance calls involving Medicare patients. said the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office now recognizes inequities that have caused ambulance services to fall behind because of the high volume of Medicare cases.

As a result, the Medical Ambulance Payment Extension Act that he believes will be passed by Congress would hike payments to the tune of about \$1.7 million annually in Western New York. He said it would have no effect on taxpayers because the savings would result from changes in other reimbursement rates.

“Those \$1.7 million will save more lives than just about any other expenditure the federal government can make,” he said.

Schumer said the low Medicare payments mean ambulance providers lack the money to obtain equipment like GPS tracking and mapping devices, as well as respiratory assistance devices like continuous positive airway pressure, which provides oxygenated airway pressure that reduces the need to intubate patients in severe congestive heart failure.