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## Aid a concern for emergency services

### State lawmaker gathers input from officials

By Jim Wright Press & Sun-Bulletin May 2, 2008

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TOWN OF CHENANGO -- The challenges facing volunteer fire and emergency medical services are creating havoc throughout the Southern Tier and newly announced state budget cuts are expected to cause additional hardships for departments seeking to recruit, train and retain new members.

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This was the message two dozen volunteer service leaders gave to Assemblyman Clifford W. Crouch, R-Guilford, on Thursday in the first of a series of meetings being held throughout the state.

"We are going to be seeking grassroots input from across the state addressing the needs of volunteer first responders and encouraging more citizens to donate their time to keep their communities safe," said Crouch. The series of eight hearings could take up to two years.

Crouch said the group is expected to file an interim report later this year and would start looking at legislation to address some of the problem areas before the next legislative session.

"Our emergency medical service demand, especially in the rural areas, is relentless,"

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Broome County EMS Coordinator Raymond

Serowik said. He called for the Legislature to look at allowing volunteer ambulance companies to bill for their services.

"The outdated section of the law prohibiting this is driving some volunteer services out of business," Broome County Emergency Services Coordinator Brett Chellis said. "The rural parts of Broome County can't provide emergency medical service, either volunteer or paid. We are in a critical need in these areas of the county and the ability to have a countywide emergency medical service might be the answer."

Chellis also said he could foresee the fire service being a combination of career and volunteer departments to get the best results of manpower and response times.

Several Broome and Chenango County departments and officials with the Firemen's Association of the State of New York complained about scheduled cutbacks in training funds.

Broome and Chenango counties were informed this week they were not going to get additional state instructors, one for each county, promised by the state Office of Fire Prevention and Control, Chellis said.

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