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Lawsuit against Air-1 helicopter dismissed

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Syracuse (WSYR-TV) – A lawsuit against Onondaga County Sheriff’s Air-1 helicopter has been dismissed. Mercy Flight Central, Inc. filed the suit in Federal Court two years ago, alleging that Air-1 was providing competing services without proper certification.

The lawsuit, which was first filed in 2007, named the Onondaga County Sheriff’s Office, New York State Police, Central New York Regional Emergency Medical Services Council and TLC Emergency Medical Services, Inc. Mercy Flight Central, Inc. claimed that Air-1 was in violation of Federal law because they provided medical rescue services without proper certification. There are only a few choppers in the area that can be used for air medical transport, and Mercy Flight claimed Air-1 was jumping their calls.

The Sheriff’s Department reports that the helicopter flew a total of 611.5 hours on 1,643 calls for service in 2009. 22 of those were medivac missions.

On February 17, Undersheriff Warren Darby has said that air medical rescue work is a small part of Air-1’s mission. 90% of the time, he said, the helicopter is used for law enforcement purposes. "We don't jump calls, the calls that have been directed to us for audit that were alleged jumping, we were in the air on other missions and being in the air we were the closest available," he said.

In a press release, the Sheriff’s Office said they were pleased with the Court’s decision to dismiss the lawsuit. The Court’s decision agreed with that the practice of dispatching the closest medivac helicopter. "We felt we were right at the beginning," said Undersheriff Darby. "I think we’ve been proven by at least the federal court that we were right, that the closest available air medical service should get that patient to the hospital in as quick a manner as possible so that we can be within the golden hour to save that patient."

Mercy Flight Central CEO Paul Hyland says he's disappointed with the ruling and plans to appeal.

Mercy Flight Central’s pending lawsuit against Air-1

Syracuse (WSYR-TV) - A fight continues to simmer over who is flying patients from accident scenes to the hospital. The non-profit Mercy Flight Central has a federal lawsuit pending claiming police helicopters, specifically Onondaga County’s Air-1, are not following proper protocol and jumping calls.



(WSYR-TV)

Mercy has pulled out of a central dispatch center system for air medical transport as a result.

There are only a few choppers in the area that can be used for air medical transport. Two of those are the State Police helicopter and Air One, and are used for other things as well.

Undersheriff Warren Darby says Air-1 is used over 90% of its time for law enforcement purposes. "We don't jump calls, the calls that have been directed to us for audit that were alleged jumping, we were in the air on other missions and being in the air we were the closest available."

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Mercy Flight Central's Paul Hyland contends that they're always ready for a call, and that's why he says they should be getting the calls. "We're not saying there isn't a place for them out there but they shouldn't be putting themselves up in front of commercial operations," he said.

Hyland also says the cost of their flights doesn't fall on the taxpayers, like it does with police helicopters. For Darby, however, the law enforcement helicopters are simply the protocol set up by the region's medical director. "He said for air medical services the closest available appropriately staffed helicopter should be the one responding to you, or I, or whoever the victim may be that needs it."

Clearinghouse tracks medical transportation

Syracuse (WSYR-TV) - When the roads get slippery, rescue crews become busier, but the same weather conditions that cause an increase in crashes usually prevent emergency helicopters from taking off.

Once involved in the air medical clearinghouse, Mercy Flight Central has opted out, in part because Hyland says the clearinghouse has only made the process less efficient. Hyland says it hasn't cut down on their calls any, they're still available to be contacted directly by any 911 center, or even by the clearinghouse if necessary. It can be a lifesaver, but it's not so easy to use air medical transport.

The call went out earlier this month for a medical helicopter to the scene of a bad crash in Scriba, but the Air Medical Clearinghouse had no chopper available to respond. In this case, weather had them on the ground. TLC Medical Transportation's Lon Fricano says they use the information in the clearinghouse to make transportation more efficient. "The intent of the air medical clearinghouse is to keep track of resources, what they're doing, are they available, where are they so the proper agency can be dispatched again with the idea of saving as much time as possible."

"We need to keep our medical services so that we know where each are at any one particular time, then use the closest available, for the patient that's the best case scenario," says Onondaga County Undersheriff Warren Darby

The people on the ground actually have to make the determination is it faster to fly somebody to the hospital or can you get them there quicker by ambulance. "In many cases ground transportation can actually be faster when you take into account all of the steps that are necessary to perform correctly in an air medical application," Fricano said.

"We're also the highest level of care in the field being critical care, carrying a nurse, paramedic and the police helicopters usually only have a paramedic on board," Hyland said.

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Actor John Stamos has pulled out of performing on *Dancing With The Stars* because he doesn't have the skills.

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