

The Honorable [Your mayor's name here]
Mayor [Your town's name here]
address
city, state, zip code

Re: Impending Pre-Hospital Emergency

Dear Mr./Mrs.

As your community's emergency medical services (EMS) provider, we need to inform our municipal officials of impending federal changes that threaten to dismantle the EMS system in the state and eliminate its volunteer first aid squads.

The "Balanced Budget Act of 1997" charged federal agencies with reducing their expenditures. In keeping with that law, the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) has begun development of a new "Medicare/Ambulance Fee Schedule" which will substantially reduce reimbursement to advanced life support (ALS) services nationwide.

In order to understand how Medicare reductions will affect New Jersey, it is first necessary to understand how our present EMS system operates:

Currently, pre-hospital care in N.J. is provided by a two-tiered system. Basic life support (BLS) is provided primarily by volunteer first aid squads staffed by emergency medical technicians (EMTs) who treat and transport patients in their ambulances at no charge to the patient. Added to this is an advanced life support system provided primarily by paid hospital-based paramedics. The paramedics work together with the volunteers, providing advanced care to the most ill or injured patients en route to the hospital. These paramedics, under direct medical direction, administer many life-saving medications and are able to provide advanced airway support. Essentially, they bring the emergency department to the patient. The paramedics, however, do not transport patients; they work with the BLS crews in the ambulances provided by the local first aid squads as the volunteers provide the transport network. These ALS patients encompass about 15% of all pre-hospital transports.

This system has been in place in N.J. for more than 20 years and provides BLS and ALS coverage to 100% of our citizens that is both cost-effective (since BLS is free) and of extremely high quality (since each ALS unit is staffed by two highly-trained paramedics under strict medical control). No other state provides this two-tiered level of high quality medical care to 100% of its citizens!

How will this new Medicare fee schedule affect our system?

Although final details will not be available until mid-February, it is likely that there will be no reimbursement for non-transport vehicles (nearly the entire ALS system in N.J.) and that reimbursement for patients who are transported will be significantly less than is currently the case. There is the very real potential for dramatic destabilization of our current system. Conflicts are likely between ALS, BLS, and proprietary services. Hospitals may no longer be able to afford to provide paramedics. Our citizens will likely suffer increased morbidity and mortality. Scientific data has shown that patient survival is directly related to pre-hospital response times, time to cardiac defibrillation, and time

to advanced airway control. All three of these links to survival will be adversely affected by the proposed HCFA changes.

This letter is to inform you of the impending situation. Within the next month, we will seek your support in taking specific action to maintain our present EMS system. We will also request that this town make a resolution supporting its volunteer first aid squad and the present EMS system in New Jersey. This resolution should be sent to state and federal legislators representing our districts.

If there is any question concerning information in this letter, would you please call [your spokesperson's name here & telephone number].

For the continuation of volunteer services and the survival of the present EMS system in New Jersey, we need your immediate support.

Sincerely yours,

[captain, president, squad
name]

The Honorable [Your Senator/Assemblyperson's name here]
address
city, state, zip code

Re: Impending Pre-Hospital Emergency

Dear Mr./Mrs.

As the volunteer emergency medical services (EMS) provider to [your community's name here], we would like to apprise you of impending federal changes that threaten to dismantle the EMS system in the state and eliminate its volunteer first aid squads.

As you are well aware, the "Balanced Budget Act of 1997" charged federal agencies with reducing their expenditures. In keeping with that law, the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) has begun development of a new "Medicare/Ambulance Fee Schedule" which will substantially reduce reimbursement to advanced life support (ALS) services nationwide. In New Jersey, any change in the system will significantly fragment emergency medical services to our citizens.

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[captain, president, squad
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