

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

FAC Position

The Florida Association of Counties supports maintaining a countywide regulatory system for emergency medical services through the current Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (COPCN) process.

Key Points

The state's current EMS system provides clinically sound and sophisticated services in a manner that is operationally efficient and is at a reasonable cost to the taxpayers, patients and their insurers. The counties' EMS systems operate with a definite balance between the demands of the emergency response and transport system and the need to maintain a low tax subsidy.

The present Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (COPCN) process assures that quality EMS services are provided equally throughout a county regardless of population concentration or district boundaries. Breaking this process down to a municipal level will make equitable EMS coverage in unincorporated or less populated areas both difficult and costly to maintain. In addition, fragmentation of county EMS systems will cause differing levels of response reliability, varying levels or standards of care, differing responses in terms of equipment and staffing resources, and loss of patient choice in determining what hospital to transport a patient. This is an especially important issue to both insurers and patients as claims are denied because services were rendered by a hospital and/or physician outside of their health plan's provider network.

Past experience shows fragmentation increases costs, increases duplication of government services, and risks lives. The COPCN law was enacted many years ago to prevent multiple ambulances racing to an emergency scene and fighting over who will transport the victim. In addition, (especially with the use of cellular phones) the precise location of a medical emergency or serious trauma may be unclear. Emergency calls may be routed to different 9-1-1 centers and rescue vehicles may be dispatched from the wrong jurisdiction delaying care. In a countywide coordinated system, everyone gets equal, high quality care while keeping costs down. The existing county COPCN process has been effective because it eliminates the confusion and ambiguity for providers when operating in each municipal or special district jurisdiction.

Granting municipalities the authority to regulate ambulance services creates more government regulation and additional regulatory hurdles for all EMS providers. Changes could potentially require each EMS provider, both public and private, to obtain a COPCN from each city and county in which they wish to operate. The costs to each

governmental and private ambulance provider for this additional regulation would be substantial. The burden on providers to comply with differing regulations imposed by various municipalities would not be feasible. This would also cause a problem for hospitals that provide critical care ground and air ambulance interfacility transports throughout multi-county regions.

Finally, allowing municipalities to regulate ambulance services will lead to high costs to the consumer. The multiple agencies providing services will have to maintain adequate infrastructures to provide services, thus eliminating the cost savings realized through economics of scale. Municipal EMS regulation/provision will require cities to hire more staff to monitor COPCN regulations. If a city decides to provide its own ambulance services, ambulance staff, clerical staff, dispatch staff, vehicles and equipment will have to be purchased, dramatically driving up costs.

FLC Position

The Florida League of Cities supports legislation that removes all restrictions from municipalities to obtain and receive a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (COPCN) for emergency medical services and transport.

Key Points

Many municipalities in Florida contract ambulance services through their respective county's ambulance providers in an effort to ensure emergency services to their citizens. However, many of these municipalities' fire departments are the first to arrive on the scene of a medical emergency due to the strategic locations of city fire stations. Fire personnel administer patient assessment and treatment, including Advanced Life Support (ALS) or Basic Life Support (BLS). Once stabilized, the patient is prepared, but not transported, by fire department personnel who often must wait for the arrival of the "certificated" county ambulance company. In some instances, this unnecessary delay has been fatal to the treatment of patients. Even if the county transport timely arrives, but the patient could not be stabilized and remains in critical condition, frequently it is required by the fire department's presiding medical director that fire personnel continue treatment as they proceed to the hospital in the ambulance.

These procedures are duplicative and costly to municipalities and most importantly, harmful to the public. Under Florida Law, a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (COPCN) for emergency medical transport may only be provided by the county; presumably to ensure the cost effectiveness of the county-wide medical transport system. However, the experience in many communities has been that those municipalities who desire to provide medical services and transport to supplement existing countywide coverage have continually been denied.

Much like the provision of other essential services, such as police and fire protection, removing restrictions to allow municipalities to obtain a COPCN could improve system efficiency and decrease delay in patient care, thereby reducing potential risk to public health and safety.