

5305

Official Testimony

Edward
Haberer

Dear Members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee:

I am here today to testify in favor of *HB 5305 Exempting for regulation Certain Nonprofit Volunteer Ambulance Services or Companies*. This bill is a result of a dilemma with our local Westerly Ambulance Association in Westerly, RI and is extremely important to my constituents (*and even my family*) as we live in Pawcatuck, CT which is serviced by this organization.

As First Selectman of the Town of Stonington, I have to say in my 3 short years, this particular issue has been one of the most vocal concerns with respect to constituents writing, calling, emailing and contacting me in person in regard to the inability of Westerly Ambulance to offer subscriptions to Pawcatuck residents last year. The stories of seniors being nervous of getting ill because of the expense they might incur, failing to call 911 because of the possible cost, and/or doctors concerned how patients will be transported depending if it is covered by insurance is heartbreaking to me.

For many years, residents of Pawcatuck, CT, *including me and my own family*, have subscribed to the Westerly Ambulance Corps, Inc subscription membership program. This \$35.00 membership has provided a number of benefits to our community. The subscription membership entitles the individual to emergency and non-emergency transport to any hospital within 100 miles of Westerly/Pawcatuck when requested by police, physicians or appropriate 911 calls and when service is provided by the Westerly Ambulance Corps, Inc. More importantly the organization will bill your insurance, but any remaining balance will be waived.

I was contacted by Westerly Ambulance when this concern first surfaced. After that, State Senator Andy Maynard and I met with Westerly Ambulance officials early in 2009 to discuss the options to remedy this arcane insurance law. After difficulty last year to address this problem, I invited State Representative Steve Fontana, House Co- Chairman and State Sen. Joe Crisco, Senate Co-Chairman back on August 21st at Stonington Arms in Pawcatuck. I appreciate you both for attending and this provided a chance to for the public to discuss concerns and provide input to you regarding this issue.

The problem seemed to be centered on a legal interpretation of the word "insurance" in a Connecticut law, which defined the ambulance service as an insurance company if they sold subscriptions. The ability of individuals to not have to incur outstanding balances for ambulance transportation is critical to financially strapped residents. A recent study has shown 50 percent of all bankruptcy filings were partly the result of medical expenses and every 30 seconds in the United States, someone files for bankruptcy in the aftermath of a serious health problem.

Also, the costs for maintaining ambulance services have risen. Such services as advanced life support services and specialty rescue services are expensive to maintain and now the federal government has cut the amount it will pay for ambulance services for Medicaid patients. Furthermore, due to budget cuts we as a town had to cut the allotment to the local ambulance corps and this year any allotment is in jeopardy. Westerly Ambulance Corps, Inc. is a private,

not-for-profit volunteer based organization which has been serving our community since 1917. They are a wonderful organization that does excellent work as all our ambulance services do. This organization should be exempt for regulation and should have an opportunity to augment funds by offering subscriptions to residents. I thank you very much for your consideration and am available for any questions.

Edward Haberek Jr.
First Selectman