

Transportation Committee

Public Hearing, March 7, 2011

Testimony of

Gayle P. Close, Deputy Director/AEMT Darien Emergency Medical Services,

Raised Bill No. 6148

An Act Requiring the Operator of a Vehicle Other Than an Emergency Vehicle to Remain at Least Five Hundred Feet Behind an Ambulance That Is Using Flashing Lights Or a Siren.

Dear Senator Maynard, Representative Guerrero, Senator Boucher, Representative Scribner and members of the Transportation Committee: My name is Gayle Close and I am the Deputy Director of Darien Emergency Medical Services and a Connecticut state licensed Advanced Emergency Medical Technician. I am here today to support the proposed legislation, HB No. 6148.

As the Deputy Director of Darien Emergency Medical Services for the past two years, and an AEMT for six years, I know first-hand what it is like to be in the back of a transporting ambulance. It is critical for the safety and treatment of a patient, for the EMS crew to be focused on them and not on a motor vehicle operator riding our bumper. There are many times when a trailing motorist decides that by staying immediately behind our truck with its lights and sirens engaged, will enable them to have a quicker traffic path to their destination. I am no longer amazed that drivers are oblivious to our lights and sirens on a 911 call. This in-attention then requires the ambulance driver to constantly utilize his air horn (largely ineffective) to provide any real distance between ambulance and following vehicles.

The number one concern for any first responder is establishing and maintaining scene safety. In the case of Darien Emergency Medical Services, we service exits 10-14 of Interstate 95, requiring our local fire department to secure the safety of the scene. With I-95's multiple lanes, often we find ourselves extricating a passenger from a vehicle with traffic still approaching and needing to switch lanes. This switching often happens dangerously close to the scene. Presently, with no restriction on distance to our vehicles, we always assign a crew member the task of watching for oncoming highway traffic while we are focused on the patient. When it is time for us to transport from the scene to the hospital, it is difficult to merge into the oncoming traffic even with our lights and sirens.

On local routes, such as Boston Post Road, we are often double-parked while tending to our patient. We are compromised by vehicles approaching too rapidly, and too close, to our rear doors that are used to off-board equipment and on-board patients. It detracts from patient care and attention, and adds an unnecessary stressor to an already difficult process.

In closing, requiring a "safe distance" for vehicles to follow an ambulance ensures better protection for not only patient and crew, but for uninjured family members as well. Many times those family members accompany us in the ambulance, and so multiple citizens will be aided in transport. Should this legislation be enacted, everyone operating and being serviced by an EMT vehicle will benefit from increased efficiency, safety, and good health. Thank you for your time and consideration, and we look forward to your decision.