

Seeking to bill for EMS

■ **Fire departments** would be able to charge insurers

■ **Former chief:** Legislation would ultimately save lives

BY CRAIG SCHNEIDER
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Several Long Island elected officials and volunteer fire service leaders expressed support Thursday for legislation that would allow fire departments to bill insurance companies and government benefits programs for emergency medical services.

Tom McDonough, former chief of the Port Washington Fire Department, said the measure would generate needed revenue — and ultimately save lives.

Many departments are facing tight budgets as well as an increase in medical response calls, McDonough said during a news conference Thursday at the Port Washington Fire Department.

Some departments have been forced to cut back or eliminate EMS services. If that trend continues, there could be longer response times during medical emergencies, he said. His department has felt budget pressures due to a decline in volunteers that has forced it to hire professional paramedics.

“As long as we keep these ambulances community-based, we’re saving lives,” said McDonough, also a committee vice chairman for the Firemen’s Association of the State of New York.

The measure could bring in upward of \$700,000 a year to the Port Washington department, which is handling about twice as many medical responses than



Former Port Washington fire chief Tom McDonough: Revenue is needed. ■ Video: newsday.com/long-island

fire calls, officials said.

Under the proposed legislation, fire departments would bill insurance companies and government benefits programs — not the people receiving services, said Jerry DeLuca, executive director of the New York State Association of Fire Chiefs.

But opponents say the bill, which has languished in the State Legislature for years, puts a price on a service Island residents are already paying for with property taxes and could result in higher insurance premiums.

State Sen. Elaine Phillips (R-Flower Hill) said fire departments are the only emergency medical service prohibited from billing for their services. Private EMS firms and police and hospi-

tal EMS providers can submit bills, she said. “This is wrong and needs to change,” she said.

Proponents say the bill, which is under committee review in the Senate and Assembly, will not increase taxes. They reject the idea that the measure could prompt insurance companies to raise premiums or increase the financial burden on taxpayer-funded Medicare and Medicaid programs.

Many health insurance plans already cover ambulance services, so “they’re already paying for it,” DeLuca said.

Assemb. Anthony D’Urso (D-Port Washington) said the great majority of departments on Long Island are staffed by volunteers. Pointing out their sacrifices, he said it’s time for the

state to back them on this issue.

The bill is opposed by the United New York Ambulance Network, the trade organization for private ambulance operators.

Alan Lewis, the group’s governmental affairs chairman, said the plan threatens certain Medicare payments for EMS for people in about 20 counties that the federal government has designated as rural, most of them upstate.

He said Medicare will not pay for EMS in instances when fire departments work with private firms that provide advanced life-support services.

DeLuca, of the fire chiefs association, said the bill changes the way Medicare reimbursements are paid, but does not eliminate any benefits.

Suffolk bill would add drugs to social host law

BY DAVID M. SCHWARTZ
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Suffolk lawmakers want to update the county’s social host law to punish adults who allow minors to use opioids and other controlled substances in their homes.

Following a similar proposal put forward in Nassau this week, opioids, marijuana, cocaine and anabolic steroids would be added to the county law, said Legis. Tom Cilmi

(R-Bay Shore), legislative minority leader. Currently, the law makes it a misdemeanor for adults to allow underage drinking in their homes.

“We want to send a loud and clear message to parents that whether it’s alcohol or illegal drugs, condoning this behavior will simply not be tolerated,” Cilmi said in an interview.

Cilmi requested legislative counsel George Nolan draft a bill based on Nassau’s proposed changes. Majority Democrats

said they’d support including drugs in Suffolk’s social host law.

“The adult has a responsibility for conduct of a minor under their care,” said Legis. Rob Calarco (D-Patchogue), deputy presiding officer.

Cilmi sponsored a successful bill in 2016 that increased penalties for knowingly hosting underage drinking. He said he had inquired about including illicit drugs, but was told other laws covered them.

Violating the county’s social

host law comes with a fine of up to \$500 for the first offense, and up to \$1,000 fine and/or a year in prison for a second and subsequent offenses.

The opioid crisis took the lives of some 600 Long Islanders last year, including about 400 in Suffolk, according to county medical officials.

Earlier this week, Nassau County Republican lawmakers announced a bill to add opioids and other controlled substances to Nassau’s law.

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THIS DATE IN HISTORY

1923 The burial chamber of King Tutankhamen’s recently unearthed tomb was unsealed in Egypt by English archaeologist Howard Carter.

1937 Du Pont research chemist Dr. Wallace H. Carothers, inventor of nylon, received a patent for the synthetic fiber, described as “linear condensation polymers.”

1959 Fidel Castro became premier of Cuba a month and a-half after the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista.

1961 The United States launched the Explorer 9 satellite.

1968 The nation’s first 911 emergency telephone system was inaugurated in Haleyville, Alabama, as the speaker of the Alabama House, Rankin Fite, placed a call from the mayor’s office in City Hall to a red telephone at the police station (also in City Hall) that was answered by U.S. Rep. Tom Bevill.

1988 Seven people were shot to death during an office rampage in Sunnyvale, California, by a man obsessed with a co-worker who was wounded in the attack. (The gunman is on death row.)