

Susan Parker, Chautauqua County Legislator - Fredonia

My name is Susan Parker. I am a county legislator, social worker, and registered nurse in Chautauqua County. I'd like to thank Attorney General Leticia James and her staff for this opportunity to testify online concerning the Mental Health access and transport problem that is particular to Chautauqua County in Western NY. I'd also like to thank Governor Hochul for her plans to increase funding and availability of Mental Health services.

The Problem: The main concern is that the utilization of police vehicles for lengthy emergency mental health transports is not safe or in accordance with police or mental health best practices. This form of transport is potentially harmful for persons in mental health crises that now need to be transported to a hospital ER on the other side of a large rural county. This practice is already creating the potential for harm because of the lack of mobile mental health supports and local access to emergency care.

The History: The closure of Lakeshore Hospital in Irving NY, along with the discontinuation of the 9.39 designation at the Brooks Hospital Emergency Room in the City of Dunkirk, has drastically lengthened the distance that local Police officers have to travel with individuals who need emergency 941 or 945 transports to the City of Jamestown on the other side of the county.

Police Officials in the northern county state that their number one goal is the preservation of life. To accomplish this, they must use the best safety practices available. Police departments have met with county officials to discuss and work on this issue. Currently, there are mobile mental health units available during day-time hours in north and south county. After that, there is one unit that covers the entirety of Chautauqua County, which is a large geographic area, and it is not always available. A 23+ hour stabilization center for mental health care is planned, but in south county only, in Jamestown.

Potential Solutions:

- Create a stabilization unit (23+ hour) in northern Chautauqua County, possibly in the city of Dunkirk.
- Provide funding to create 24-hour mobile mental health units for northern Chautauqua County. Have

a 24-hour mobile health crisis team available to work in conjunction with or separate from the police, depending on the circumstances, to transport individuals in a mental health crisis for needed care.

-If it is necessary under certain circumstances for the police to be involved in an emergency mental health transport, reduce the distance a person in crisis is in a police vehicle must travel.

-Fund the creation of an appropriately safe and well-staffed 9.39 station at Brooks Hospital in the City of Dunkirk or in its new location.

Thank you for letting me share my testimony asking for assistance for Chautauqua and other rural counties.

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