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Upper Dauphin Council of Governments Undertakes Study to Address Region’s EMS Challenges

Halifax, PA (December 17, 2024) – The Upper Dauphin Council of Governments (UDCOG), comprised of elected officials of municipalities in northern Dauphin County, today announced it has undertaken a study to address challenges facing the region’s emergency medical services (EMS) system. The study will inform the development of a regional plan to sustain high-quality EMS for area residents.

“EMS organizations throughout the country are experiencing significant challenges including declining voluntary membership subscriptions, inadequate insurance reimbursements and staff shortages,” said Christopher Dietz, president of the UDCOG. “EMS organizations in the Upper Dauphin region have not been immune to these challenges. Add in growing call volumes and increasing costs to operate and we have a scenario that puts our local EMS system at risk.”

A recent survey of the region’s emergency services providers and municipal officials found that 50% believe local EMS providers are at risk of closing. Ninety percent of respondents reported their biggest challenges are volunteer declines; increasing costs; and lack of community financial support. 90% percent of respondents also indicated that a new model emphasizing financial stability is needed; and 80% indicated a new model emphasizing professional staffing is needed.

Per state law, local municipalities are legally obligated to provide emergency services in Pennsylvania, Dietz notes.

“It is critical that local leaders and the citizens they represent are aware of the situation our EMS system is facing,” Dietz said. “Unless our local municipalities address this issue together, the system may not be able to provide emergency care when you or a family member, friend, neighbor or co-worker needs it.”

The EMS system in northern Dauphin County is further strained because the region is a rural area.

“With fewer EMS resources and a population spread out over a large area, response times to 911 calls can be dangerously long,” Dietz said. “A cardiac arrest patient, for example, can’t wait over a half hour for an EMS response from outside our region because a closer unit is on another call or isn’t staffed and available.”

The study is engaging Upper Dauphin region EMS providers, fire companies, municipal officials and other community stakeholders. The UDCOG expects to complete the study by spring 2025, after which it will present recommendations to its participating municipalities and to the general public to create a better and sustainable EMS system for the region. ROBB Consulting, LLC, a multi-disciplinary firm that specializes in solutions for EMS agencies, fire companies and local government, is conducting the study for UDCOG.

Northern Dauphin County residents are encouraged to learn more and get involved by attending their local municipal public meetings and contacting their local elected officials to voice support for a sustainable solution for EMS in Upper Dauphin County.

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About Upper Dauphin Council of Governments

The Upper Dauphin Council of Governments (UDCOG) is a regional organization comprised of participating local governments in northern Dauphin County. UDCOG's mission is to provide a forum for regional cooperation and preparing for and handling issues of municipalities in Upper Dauphin County. UDCOG typically meets on the third Thursday evening of January, April, July, and November at various local government offices in northern Dauphin County.

Municipalities that participate in the UDCOG include: The boroughs of Berrysburg, Elizabethville, Gratz, Halifax, Lykens, Millersburg, Pillow and Williamstown; and the townships of Halifax, Jackson, Jefferson, Lykens, Mifflin, Reed, Rush, Upper Paxton, Washington, Wayne, Wiconisco and Williams.