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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 15, 2024

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Ambulance Issues in Rural NYS Issue Paper Updated

WATERTOWN, NEW YORK – The Tug Hill Commission recently updated its ***Ambulance Issues in Rural New York State*** issue paper, available on the commission website at tughill.org/publications/technical-issue-papers/. Rising costs, lack of staffing and declining volunteerism continue to affect the provision of emergency response to rural NY residents. Most recently in the Tug Hill region, the North Shore Ambulance Service closed its door unexpectedly in July 2024. A July 25, 2024 Facebook post from the ambulance service sums it up well. *“North Shore Ambulance has struggled with declining or stagnant reimbursement rates, direct-to-patient insurance payments without remittance, increased operational costs, increased payroll expenses, and insufficient funding. Despite our best efforts to secure additional resources and support and attempts to venture into new markets to increase revenue, these challenges have ultimately made it unsustainable to continue our operations.”* Without concerted effort on various fronts to address these challenges, emergency response times in rural areas will continue to increase, putting the health of rural residents at risk.

Commission Executive Director Katie Malinowski said, “This report is intended to increase the understanding and awareness of how emergency medical services are provided and the issues and policies being discussed across the state. Thank you to all the organizations and individuals providing emergency medical services, and thank you to our statewide partners that are working to improve the way this critically important service is provided.”

New York State Association of Counties Executive Director Stephen Acquario said, “The dire picture painted by this report reinforces what we’ve seen and heard from many counties across the state: that rising costs, stagnant reimbursements, and declining volunteerism are driving up response times and forcing many local EMS providers to cease operations. Every New Yorker should be able to count on fast and reliable EMS service in an emergency situation, which is why this year, counties worked with EMS advocates and state lawmakers to craft the “Rescue EMS” package of legislation to address many of the challenges raised in this report. Counties commend the Tug Hill Commission for shining a light on the crisis facing many of New York’s rural EMS providers and look forward to working with them and other stakeholders to strengthen this essential service.”

“The Association of Towns appreciates and supports the important work the New York State Tug Hill Commission took in researching this topic. It goes without saying the benefits a strong contingent of skilled first responders can bring to rural New Yorkers, and AOT supports measures that will thoughtfully attract and retain volunteers and assist municipalities in defraying the costs of providing this extremely vital service,” commented Association of Towns of the State of New York Executive Director Christopher Koetzle.

Mark Deavers, Vice President of the NYS Volunteer Ambulance and Rescue Association stated that "providing emergency medical response in rural areas is a rewarding yet challenging service to provide. As the gap between costs of providing service and the amount collected through Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance and personal payments widens, ambulances struggle to balance the books. Decreasing volunteerism, increasing hourly rates for paid EMTs, shortage of qualified workers, and increasing requirements for equipment and training are combining to cause severe financial stress to ambulances across rural New York. Growing the understanding and partnerships with towns, villages, counties, BOCES and others is key to keeping emergency services affordable and effective."

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The New York State Tug Hill Commission is a non-regulatory state agency charged with helping local governments, organizations, and citizens shape the future of the region, especially its environment and economy. The commission uses a grassroots approach to build local capacity and provide technical assistance in land use planning, community development, and natural resource management.