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New Jersey EMS Educators Warn of Corzine EMS Disaster

NJ Emergency Medical Services Educators Association
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ROSELLE, N.J. -- Gov. Jon Corzine's plans to slash a state fund to train Emergency Medical Technicians in New Jersey could have a disastrous impact on the already stressed EMS system, according to a top EMS education organization.

Gov. Corzine's 2010 budget includes moving \$4 million out of the EMT Training Fund, a fund used to pay for the education of volunteer EMTs around the state, and use those monies to help alleviate the state's budget crisis.

"This action would in effect discontinue training for NJ volunteer EMTs and force individuals – during a recession – to pay for their own training to donate their time to their communities," said John Mateus, president of the New Jersey Medical Services Educator's Association.

"This could directly impact public safety," Mateus said.

A reduction in funds to pay for the education of EMTs could force some volunteers to give up donating their time, and push some smaller volunteer EMS squads out of operation.

The EMT Training Fund is a public trust created by legislature. Monies for the fund are raised through a 50-cent fee placed on all moving violations in the state.

Mateus said the fund spends \$1 million more than it takes in each year, and that the \$4 million being eyed by Corzine is critical to the safety of residents. If volunteers can't afford to pay for their education – the basic EMT class costs more than \$500 – EMS service would be hurt. Moreover, municipalities would be forced to create their own organizations to replace the volunteers, placing a huge tax burden on already strapped communities.

Corzine's action would leave just \$400,000 in the fund as of July 1, and, given the annual deficit, essentially mean training would come to a halt.

"Raiding this fund to finance state spending is awful," said Mateus. "If we can trust the government with our fund, who can we trust?"

Mateus said the NJEMSEA had launched an effort to get everyone involved in EMS work in the state to reach out to their local elected officials and Corzine's office. Information about

the campaign can be found at NJEMSEA.org.

He also said it was important for the public to get involved, too.

"This is not just an EMT issue, it's a public safety issue," Mateus said. "If volunteers are unable to maintain their educational training, the state will lose a vital part of the pre-hospital care system in the state. If residents enjoy knowing their volunteer squad will respond when they dial 911, they need to act now to protect themselves, and the volunteer system."

More about the SAVE THE NJ EMT TRAINING FUND campaign at www.njemsea.org

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