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EMT official: Corzine funding plan would be 'tragic decision'

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If Governor Corzine follows through on a plan to "raid" \$4 million from a fund designed to train Emergency Medical Technicians, about 20,000 volunteer first-aid squad members statewide would be forced to pay for their training, a top state EMT official said Monday.

John Mateus, president of the New Jersey Medical Services Educator's Association, said Corzine would be making a "tragic decision" if he uses the money to plug a hole in the state budget.

"We hope he reconsiders," Mateus said.

Mateus said EMTs might not be able to afford to pay for their training in this economy, which could put the burden of hiring paid emergency services on municipalities.

Using the \$4 million was a difficult decision that had to be made to offset revenue losses in the current budget year brought on by a bad economy, said Tom Vincz, a spokesman for the state Department of Treasury.

"There are many actions in this budget that, under circumstances other than a fiscal emergency, we would not do," Vincz said. "We had to meet our constitutional obligations to bring balance to this budget. We made the decision the fund could absorb this reduction."

There is currently a \$400,000 "nest egg" in the fund, Mateus said, adding that the fund spends \$1 million more than it takes in.

The redirection of the \$4 million is contained in a laundry list of "Use of Non-Recurring Resources" in the FY2010 budget proposal.

The fund was created in 1995 and receives 50 cents from every moving violation in the state.

Mateus said he hopes a letter-writing campaign will convince the governor to

change his mind.

The campaign includes a flyer, "Say Thanks to Corzine," showing the governor in a wheelchair the day he was released from a Camden hospital thanking those who treated him after he suffered broken ribs and a broken femur in a much-publicized April 2007 car crash.

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