

## Lt. Governor Simon testifies on rural EMS issues

Written by Kathryn Phillips

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Asks state to consider more online training for rural EMTs

GALESBURG – November 15, 2011. As chair of the Governor's Rural Affairs Council, Lt. Governor Sheila Simon asked a state task force today to consider expanding online training for rural emergency medical service (EMS) providers.

Simon said greater online training could improve recruitment and retention of paid and volunteer workers who must take 120 hours of continuing education every four years to remain certified. Rural emergency medical technicians often pay out-of-pocket for continuing education, which can require costly overnight travel and lost wages for volunteers who must take time off from their regular jobs, Simon said.

Simon's request came during a House EMS task force hearing at Galesburg City Hall. The 24-member House EMS task force, which is co-chaired by Reps. Don Moffitt (R-Galesburg) and Lisa Dugan (D-Kankakee), is holding public hearings across the state and will issue recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly by the end of the year.

"The EMS providers we rely on to handle life or death situations are finding themselves on life support," Simon said. "We need to find creative ways to help them attract qualified employees and manage the high cost of doing business in large areas with small populations."

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Rural providers are facing revenue problems because reimbursement rates from third-party sources such as Medicaid do not cover the increased cost of providing services, Simon said. Rural providers also report that non-emergency calls for transportation or assistance, which may not be billable or go unpaid, place further strain on budgets.

“It is a privilege to work with Lt. Governor Simon, Rep. Moffitt, fellow task force members and all the EMS personnel on this important state issue,” Dugan said. “It is imperative that we realize and help solve some of the problems EMS providers face so they can continue to serve the public.”

Under the Governor’s Rural Affairs Council, Simon is creating an EMS subcommittee to improve emergency services for rural residents. Dottie Miles, the executive director of Jackson County Ambulance Service, and Greg Scott, EMS coordinator for the McLean County Area EMS System, will serve as co-chairs of the subcommittee.

“This subcommittee will bring together a diverse group of volunteers from across rural Illinois with a variety of EMS experience,” Simon said. “I look forward to working with the subcommittee, as well as the House EMS task force, to identify innovative solutions to the problems facing rural providers and residents.”

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