Report: NJ State EMS System in a State of “Near Crisis”

Trenton, N.J. (AP) Friday 9/21/07 -- New Jersey's emergency medical services system is in need of a major overhaul, according to a state-commissioned study released Friday evening. The financial structure of the system, declines in volunteer membership, lack of comprehensive state legislation covering the system and a weakened system for responding to life-threatening incidents has created a "state of near crisis," according to the report, produced by TriData Corp. of Arlington, Va. "The New Jersey EMS system should be redesigned to manage a modern statewide EMS system," the report said.

Proposed reforms in the report include the state creating regional oversight offices, and requiring that all municipalities in the state provide EMS services. The state Department of Health and Senior Services, which commissioned the study, said in a statement that it is currently reviewing the study to determine what recommendations it will make. Other proposals include a comprehensive overhaul of state EMS legislation and regulations and the creation of a full-time state EMS medical administrator post.

The report's conclusions were based on interviews with key leaders in the EMS system, 13 focus groups of people in the system who were chosen by leaders of their respective groups and interviews with officials in the New Jersey Office of EMS.

State Sen. Senator Joseph F. Vitale, D-Middlesex, who pushed legislation last year to require the study, thought it was a little dramatic for the report to claim a near crisis in the system, but agreed that there have been coordination problems between various agencies. "In some cases, there aren't enough volunteers. There might be a response from a hospital five, 10 miles away. How can we better prepare ourselves and coordinate these efforts?" Vitale said.