State stops Bed-Stuy Volunteer Ambulance Corps EMT classes - despite successes

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Every one of its students passed the state emergency medical technician certification test - but officials are still standing in the way of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Volunteer Ambulance Corps' own EMT classes.

The state Health Department barred the corps from holding classes at its new headquarters, a $115,000 double trailer on Greene Ave., until officials make a final decision on whether the space meets regulations.

So students took classes at the state-approved Cobble Hill EMT academy, returning to the corps headquarters for extra help and hands-on experience. When results came back last week, all 22 students who took the certification exam found out they passed.

"We gave them what they needed," said corps vice president and lawyer Tamsin Wolf. "These kids would not have gotten through this course were it not for coming every evening for the mentoring, the tutoring, the support we gave."

Still, the Regional EMS Council of New York City has recommended the Health Department reject the corps' application to sponsor its own classes, saying its 585-square-foot classroom space is too small and there's no need for new EMT classes in Brooklyn.

"While the Regional Council supports and admires everything that the BSVAC has accomplished as a community volunteer ambulance corps, it can not recommend approval of this training center," Executive Director Marie Diglio wrote the Health Department.

"BSVAC has not identified a need that cannot be met by training centers currently approved and active in Kings County," Diglio added.

Wolf insisted there is a need, saying that Brooklyn only has one EMT course sponsor for every 142,000 residents, the lowest ratio in the city. Manhattan has one sponsor for every 117,000 residents.

The principal of Public School 256 on Kosciuszko St. has also agreed to let the ambulance corps use classrooms at the school for its courses.

Health Department spokeswoman Beth Goldberg said that while the regional council's recommendation "does carry weight," the department will make the final decision in two to three weeks.

She said there are no firm size standards for EMT training facilities. "We don't have a specific square footage we're looking for," she said. "They have to really have enough room to practice all the skills that they're going to need."

Corps Commander James (Rocky) Robinson said the "unheard of" 100% pass rate shows the state's objections don't hold water.

"I'm taking these kids off the street and giving them a chance, and making them pull up their pants, straighten out their hat, and get jobs - and save lives, all at the same time," he said. "What the hell is wrong with that?"

Newly minted EMT Sharaya Phillips, 22, of Bed-Stuy, said when she found out she passed the exam, "I was ecstatic. I was jumping around the house. I was speechless."

She credited the corps' instructors with helping her pass and said the group's headquarters is more spacious than the Cobble Hill academy where she had to take classes.

"I can't understand why [the state] would continue to deny us," she said. "It's very disturbing. I don't understand why. It's enough space."