

Written Proponent Testimony for SB 384

2/1/2024

Chairwoman McGinn and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dave Garnas and I am writing today to lend my support for SB 384, a bill allowing ambulances in rural communities to operate with only the minimum personnel required by state law.

I am the administrator of North Central Kansas Medical Center, located in Concordia, Kansas. We are a full service hospital with 14 inpatient beds and an active emergency department. We are an affiliate with Salina Regional Health Center and work closely together to offer the appropriate care in the appropriate setting. This often means we transfer our more acute patients to Salina and other higher acuity hospitals. In return, we accept transfers of lower acuity patients, referred to as swing-bed patients, to free up space in Salina and other PPS hospitals. This requires consistent transfer capabilities from our Ambulance Service. In our small community, this service is offered by the City of Concordia.

Current law dictates one person in the ambulance service vehicle must be an emergency medical service provider or a physician, physician assistant, and advanced practice registered nurse or a professional nurse. The key word here is ONE. Over time, the Kansas Board of Emergency Medical Services has required two people in the ambulance to meet these requirements. In communities like mine, this limits our ability to transfer patients to the correct level of care. Our community can typically only staff two people on the ambulance- the person providing the care in the back and the driver. The driver does not need to be a fully board certified medical professional. They need to be a good driver, certified in CPR.

Due to this regulatory requirement, our ambulance service often cannot take our transfer patients, as they need to keep local emergency service staffed first. This often necessitates either fixed wing flights or emergency helicopter service. This is a very expensive way to transport for short distance transfers and unnecessarily drives up the cost of care for patients. Allowing the driver of an ambulance to be a skilled driver, certified in CPR, would open up the pool of people to transfer patients in our community.

Healthcare is an eco-system where little rural hospitals like mine rely on bigger hospitals for complex services. Bigger hospitals rely on our hospital to provide lower acuity skilled care in order to free up necessary beds. Senate Bill 384 would improve timely patient care while helping to decrease healthcare costs. I encourage your support for Senate Bill 384.