

SB 970

Testimony from Harney County Commissioner Pete Runnels ... June 24, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Senate Health Care Committee,

We have an issue in southeastern Oregon regarding Air Ambulance Service. It has do with a for profit company and a not-for profit company servicing the same area. It is my belief that over 75% of the county has a membership with one company that began the service to our county as a non-profit. That company sold to a for profit a few years back, and is still based out of the same hospital, St. Charles in Bend, Oregon.

The conditions for a flight to come our direction can be many which can dictate which air ambulance responds. Weather can be a factor for one, also, one company being on a call and unable to respond can result in the other company having to respond. The issue at hand for the consumer is that the for profit company states that they cannot have a reciprocal agreement with a not for profit company, yet the non-profit disagrees and says they have agreements like that in other parts of the state. I understand that many legalities play into this and a business cannot be forced to reciprocate, but the bottom line is that this leaves the consumer in a situation where they could incur a massive debt for which they think they have bought a membership and protection. I encourage a task force be set in place to protect the consumer.

There are other circumstances that I have concerns about. Our 911 supervisor feels limited in making the call in launching an air ambulance. When there is no doubt in her mind that one is needed, she must carry the burden of knowing the not-for profit will launch and if turned back after ground ambulance arrives there will be no costs incurred. On the other hand she feels she can't make that call when it's the for profit because once launched somebody is on the hook for it. The bottom line here is the fact that when we need an air ambulance, we need it as fast as possible without constraints. We also don't want to find our county in a situation where a company is choosing which scenes they want to respond to regardless of location. We have over 10,000 square miles in our county and response times are already a challenge. If it is best for an air ambulance to respond from the east, Ontario – or the west, Bend – whichever is closest should be in the best interest of the accident victim.

As an example, I have a daughter residing in Ontario who has a membership with the non profit, yet when she travels home to Burns, her membership could be proven worthless in case of an accident and the for profit were to be called. Yet if she travels east she is covered. I have a son and family whom reside in Burns with membership with the for profit, but if they travel east could find they are uncovered there.

It is my hope that a task force can be set in place to find a solution that works for all. It is my belief that a solution can be found to protect the consumer out in the frontier counties of southeastern Oregon and also for the air ambulance providers. One thought is that counties sign 5 year agreements with ground ambulance services is there a possibility that some similar type of agreement could come out of this with air ambulance services?

Thank you for your time,

Sincerely,

Pete Runnels

Harney County Commissioner