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BARBARA LIFTON  
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125<sup>th</sup> District

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Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

February 26, 2014

Governor Andrew Cuomo  
Executive Chamber  
State Capitol  
Albany, New York 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

I am writing to alert you to the figures that are coming out of the state's recently-initiated brokerage system that has changed the way Non-Emergency Medicaid Transportation (NEMT) is delivered in several counties around the state, including Cortland County in my district. While the new system, using Medical Answering Service (MAS), was intended to save the state money, the initial data for Cortland shows otherwise.

When you compare the NEMT cost for Cortland County before and after instituting MAS, there were small savings in overall monthly Medicaid transportation costs with MAS in November, over the prior year (\$50,883 to \$54,635). In December and January, the cost with MAS cost more than over the prior year (\$55,895.33 and \$56,597.78 respectively, compared with \$54,635 in 2013).

MAS's system, that re-directs most "Dial-a-Ride" NEMT from Cortland Transit to taxis, is negatively impacting the financial viability of Cortland County's only public transit system. They may have to cut back on services and have even suggested they may shut down completely as a result of decreased funding. That would be disastrous for the many, many residents of Cortland County who depend on public transportation -- those with disabilities or mobility issues who use the bus system because it is wheelchair accessible, families who either don't have a car or who choose to use buses to get to work, appointments or shopping, students going to TC3 and Cornell, workers commuting from outlying areas into Cortland, and Cortland residents who work in Ithaca.

Loss of Cortland Transit's services would likewise impact Medicaid clients who currently use one of the fixed bus routes to get to their medical appointments. They pay only \$.50 or \$1.00, which isn't nearly enough to cover Cortland Transit's cost for providing that ride. If Cortland Transit shuts down, all those additional clients will be calling MAS, and there will be no options except taxis to transport them to their appointments. The state will then be paying for taxi service for clients who currently cost the state little or nothing. It's doubtful there will even be enough taxi capacity to deal with the increased demand. I understand MAS is already using Ithaca taxis 20 miles away to cover some of the Cortland demand.

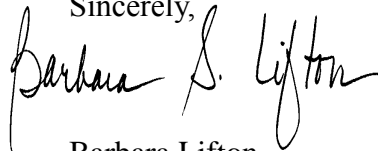
Besides the cost issue, I'm beginning to hear from my constituents about other issues with the taxi system. They tell me about missed appointments due to the taxi not picking them up on time, or not at all in some cases. Missed doctor appointments mean another call to their healthcare provider and MAS to schedule yet another ride and another charge to the state. I've heard that taxis have even refused to make a pick up because they claim they can't make enough money on that particular route. Yet others tell about several Medicaid clients packed into a taxi. They say they don't feel safe in the taxis sometimes. One woman was transported to Syracuse for surgery in a taxi filled with other clients. While these are anecdotal, the pattern is clear – the new system brings into question not only the long-term cost-effectiveness of using mostly taxis, but efficiency and safety concerns.

Many Medicaid clients are also disabled, and thus come under the protections of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Supreme Court Olmstead decision. That ruling says that we must integrate people with disabilities into the mainstream to the fullest extent possible. Having Medicaid clients take taxis segregates them from the general population, potentially stigmatizing them, which certainly is not in the spirit of Olmstead.

Public transportation allows people to get to work, school and a myriad of other appointments. It is essential for the well-being and economic vitality of our communities. In addition, it reduces greenhouse gas emissions compared to everyone driving cars. For all these reasons, we must ensure that our public transportation systems are adequately funded and kept in operation.

Thank you Governor Cuomo, for listening to my concerns and the concerns of so many in my rural district and others across the state on this most critical of issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara S. Lifton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "B" and "L".

Barbara Lifton  
Member of Assembly  
125<sup>th</sup> District

BSL/lis

Cc: Karen Rae, Deputy Secretary for Transportation  
Courtney Burke, Deputy Secretary for Health  
Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver  
MoA Richard Gottfried, Chair, Assembly Health Committee  
MoA David Gantt, Chair, Assembly Transportation Committee

