



STATE OF WASHINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

*Office of Emergency Medical Services and Trauma System
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NOTICE OF ADOPTION OF AN INTERPRETIVE STATEMENT

Title of Statement: House Bill 1237 – Relating To Specialized Commercial Vehicles Used For Patient Transportation

Issuing Entity: Department of Health
Office of Emergency Medical Services and Trauma System

Subject Matter: House Bill 1237 adds a definition for the term “stretcher,” to Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 18.73.030. The requirements outlined in RCW 18.73.180 “Other transportation vehicles” remain unchanged. This interpretive statement clarifies the provisions of House Bill 1237 and its interpretation of the issue.

Effective Date: June 20, 2005

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Interpretive Statement

HB 1237- Relating to specialized commercial vehicles used for patient transportation

Washington's EMS statute, RCW 18.73.180, requires that patients on stretchers or those who need ongoing medical care and monitoring must be transported by an ambulance licensed by the State Department of Health. The EMS statute can be accessed at the State of Washington, Office of EMS and Trauma System web site: www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/emstrauma

In 2005, legislation passed that amends the definitions found in EMS law to include the term "stretcher" (HB 1237). The bill defined as a stretcher those devices used by the ambulance industry to safely transport patients requiring ongoing medical care and/or monitoring. These devices include: wheeled stretchers, portable stretchers, stair chairs, solid backboards, scoop stretchers, basket stretchers or flexible stretchers.

The language also defines equipment used by individuals with disabilities to conduct activities of daily living, including wheelchairs, personal gurneys or banana carts. Individuals with disabilities not requiring ongoing medical care or monitoring and conducting activities of daily living who own or lease the type of equipment highlighted in the previous sentence are not required to be transported by ambulance.

Since the passage of HB 1237, some questions have been raised regarding the effect of the bill. This statement provides the Department of Health's (DOH) position on RCW 18.73.180, as amended by HB 1237.

Background

The Department of Health is responsible for the regulation of ambulance services and EMS personnel. DOH's mission is to assure patient safety in the prehospital setting. Prior to the passage of HB 1237, the law regulating ambulance services required that everyone transported by stretcher (those individuals who cannot sit or stand) must be transported by ambulance even if they do not require ongoing medical attention during transport. HB 1237 removed this restriction, while still protecting patient safety by defining the term "stretcher" and by distinguishing between a stretcher and "personal mobility aid" used to transport individuals conducting activities of daily living. Thus, HB 1237 distinguished between the needs of individuals whose activities of daily living are restricted due to their disability and those who require ongoing medical care and monitoring.

Position

HB 1237 does not affect existing EMS law relating to the transport of patients who require ongoing medical care or monitoring. Those patients must be transported by an ambulance regulated by DOH. The bill creates a clear difference between accommodating the normal activities of daily living conducted by individuals with disabilities and those patients requiring ongoing medical care and monitoring to ensure the health and welfare of the person being transported. Some examples of medical care and monitoring requiring transport by ambulance are transport to or from a hospital, skilled or assisted living facility and emergency 9-1-1 incidents. Companies that transport patients requiring stretchers because of ongoing medical care or monitoring may not be transported by vehicles that are not ambulances. Transportation in a vehicle other than an ambulance for these patients may be operating unlicensed ambulances in violation of RCW 18.73.180.