

Landmark ruling led to Milford taking over its ambulance service

By [Jill Dion](#)

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Local officials and their lawyers are touting the city's move to take over its ambulance service, saying it was the result of diligent legal work and a landmark decision by the state.

The city stands to bring in another \$1 million or more in revenue each year thanks to the hard-won change in legislation that allows Milford to provide ambulance transportation for residents to area hospitals.

The attorneys representing the city said it was "a first-of-its kind decision in Connecticut," in which the state granted a municipality's petition to revoke the transport license of its national ambulance provider and reassign that license to its municipal fire department.

"This pioneering effort was championed by the City of Milford, which now benefits from complete municipal control over the operation of, and revenue from, the provision of emergency medical services within its boundaries," according to a press release issued by the law firm of Hurwitz, Sagarin, Slossberg & Knuff.

In the past, American Medical Response (AMR) held the license for transporting Milford residents to the hospital. After two years of lobbying for state legislative change and working with the state Department of Health, Milford secured the right to transport patients and therefore bill insurance companies and/or the patients for that service.

Securing the ambulance transport license took a lot of lobbying and testimony by city officials and their lawyers.

The City of Milford first filed a petition with the Connecticut Department of Public Health in December of 2014 requesting that it assign the Milford Fire Department as the city's primary service area responder for basic level ambulance service, a change that meant ousting American Medical Response, which had held the license for Milford since 1995. The city filed its petition based on General Statutes 19a-181f, a new statute that gives municipalities the right to petition for removal and reassignment of their primary service area responders.

"After nearly two years of proceedings before the Connecticut Department of Public Health, we are thrilled that control of our city's ambulance transport services will revert to the Milford Fire Department and the community – where it belongs," said Atty. David Slossberg of the Milford-based law firm Hurwitz, Sagarin, Slossberg & Knuff, which represented the city and the Milford Fire Department throughout the proceedings.

"The state agreed that the Milford Fire Department is better suited than American Medical Response to meet this community's needs," Slossberg said. "The finding is based on Milford Fire Department's plan for additional ambulances, considerably shorter response times, increased personnel training requirements, decreased costs, and more intense scrutiny of performance standards."

The city presented written briefs and oral arguments explaining why and how provision of ambulance service by its fire department would effectively maintain or improve patient care in the area.

“Problems cited included AMR’s delayed response times, refusal to negotiate a service contract with improved standards, and failure to provide a bariatric ambulance — a specially-outfitted ambulance to accommodate the severely obese,” according to the statement that Slossberg’s firm issued.

The final decision of the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health transferred control of the basic level ambulance service in Milford to the Milford Fire Department on Oct. 17. American Medical Response had until Nov. 5 to file an appeal, Slossberg’s office said. None was filed.

Of the victory, Milford’s Fire Chief, Douglas Edo said, “It was important for the City of Milford to have control over these services, which are so crucial to the public’s health and safety. We are thrilled that the issue was decided in our favor to the great benefit of our community.”

This is the second change in the way the city handles ambulance service.

In 2013, the city started billing for paramedic services that city firefighters provide when an ambulance responds to a resident’s 911 call. Prior to 2013, AMR provided and billed for emergency medical services.

Now with this latest move the city has taken over the transportation aspect of the ambulance service as well, effectively taking over ambulance service within the city.

“The decision to remove AMR as Milford’s ambulance provider is a step towards breaking up AMR’s monopoly in the region,” states the press release issued by the city’s legal representatives. “Nationwide, AMR provides emergency transportation, federal and international disaster response, and air ambulances, among other similar services.”