

Patients Needing Rides To Medical Appointments Hurt By Poor Service, Lawmakers Told

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HARTFORD — A Georgia-based company hired by the state in 2012 to arrange non-emergency rides to medical appointments for Medicaid patients has continued to collect its \$25 million in fees, plus a performance bonus, despite a track record that some lawmakers describe as nightmarish.

Issues such as late or missed pickups, stranded patients — many of them children or the elderly — long hold times at the call center, unpaid claims submitted by the taxi and van companies, and poor quality control have dogged Logisticare, and the state agency that is supposed to be watching it, for the more than three years the firm has been under contract, according to testimony Thursday before the legislature's human services committee.

"I totally agree the system is broken," said Rep. Catherine Abercrombie, a Democrat from Meriden and the House chair of the committee. "I'll be honest. I'm not happy with the commissioner's response."

She was referring to Roderick L. Bremby, head of the Department of Social Services, who testified Thursday that DSS was working on a plan to build more accountability into Logisticare's contract.

"They've been working on this for over a year," Abercrombie said.

The committee was receptive to a **bill proposed by lawyers Sheldon Toubman of New Haven Legal Assistance and Bonnie Roswig of the Center for Children's Advocacy** that gives DSS a deadline to add safeguards and accountability measures to the contract or re-bid the job.

A spokesman for DSS, David Dearborn, acknowledged Friday that "the level of complaints and the way the contractual process has turned out are definite problems."

"We are looking at various options to resolve this, ranging from amending the contract ... to possibly overhauling the entire program," Dearborn said.

Logisticare has received annual 7.5 percent bonuses that, over the life of the contract, will total \$1.8 million. The contract is up in 10 months.

Logisticare, which operates in 40 states, is called a "broker" — the middle man between low-income patients and livery companies in Connecticut. It received requests for 4 million rides last year in Connecticut.



Gary Gross of Unionville has had issues with Logisticare, a nationwide company that provides the organization of rides for the disabled. Logisticare, according to Gross, has caused countless issues with him and others with disabilities by missing appointments and scheduled rides.

(Peter Casolino / Special to the Courant)

But what seems like a straightforward process is fraught with problems. A consultant hired by DSS found that the company routinely failed to document complaints; that some call-center operators weren't following the script when talking with patients; that Logisticare's system to pay the taxi and van companies is "inefficient and burdensome"; and that the company "appears to lack a proactive ... approach to program improvement."

The consultant said "contract language could be strengthened to improve ... monitoring and performance. The consultant's report was completed nearly two years ago.

Paul Brosak's experience was typical. The Derby resident said in written testimony to the human services committee that after a 30-minute podiatrist's appointment in Naugatuck, he called Logisticare to arrange a ride home. He was told a car would be there in a half-hour. Four hours later, none had arrived. He called his sister to come get him.

A Logisticare official said the company has worked to make improvements.

"We faced operational challenges in 2013-14 when enrollment jumped nearly 25 percent and the state's program structure didn't grow with its membership," Casey Tillman, general manager of Logisticare Connecticut, said in a statement on March 5. "A new general manager has worked diligently to resolve issues and suggest structural improvements to the state."

Advocates expressed frustration in dealing with the company.

"There have been endless attempts to communicate with the company," Roswig, a senior staff attorney with the Center for Children's Advocacy, told the legislative committee.

She said the problems cry out for a contract that provides "meaningful accountability," with requirements for staff training, clear benchmarks for wait times, response to complaints, call-center performance, and a provision for sanctions when the expectations aren't met.

After Thursday's hearing, Roswig said that advocates had to push for Logisticare to report complaints to DSS, and said the firm for a period of time was requiring that patients call three days in advance for a medical ride, when the contract calls for two days. She also said the firm was resistant to patients who said their doctors were requesting that they return to the hospital the next day for a follow-up appointment.

"The doctor would call on the patient's behalf, and there would be pushback against the doctor," Roswig said.

Dearborn said DSS may "overhaul and re-bid the service and return to a regional system, where the various contractors would be closer to the areas they serve."

Before Logisticare became DSS' sole broker, three companies arranged medical rides. That system ran more smoothly, though there were periodic complaints, advocates said.

<http://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-medicare--medical-transport-0305-20160304-story.html>