

## Under Pressure, State Moves To Better Protect Sick Children On Rides To Doctor's Visits

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### Let Down by State Program, Families Struggle to Get Rides for Medically Challenged Children

The state's overseer of nonemergency medical rides for sick children, following a federal complaint, news coverage and repeated demands from advocates, has again ordered the company holding the \$26 million transport contract do something it has always been required to do:

Enforce the rule that says children with cancer, respiratory diseases, and other illnesses that undermine their immune system, don't have to ride in the taxi with strangers. The rides are a standard Medicaid benefit; more than 4 million of these transports are arranged each year.

As late as last month, wheelchair-accessible taxis were still arriving with other passengers to pick up medically fragile children — even in the face of doctor's orders barring a shared ride. The Department of Social Services said it was reaffirming the edict, and making it apply to every child, doctor's order or not, to boost compliance by the contractor, LogistiCare, and the taxi companies. A DSS official will be stationed in the contractor's North Haven office to enforce the newly strengthened directive.

For the four years that Atlanta-based LogistiCare has held the contract to broker these rides for Medicaid patients, the shared rides have been barred whenever doctors request that the patient ride only with a parent or caregiver.

The doctors always order this, but as advocates, legislators and the media have pointed out numerous times to DSS, taxis dispatched by LogistiCare frequently pulled up with other Medicaid patients or private fares on board. In some cases, parents have accepted the ride because it would have been difficult to immediately schedule another appointment. In other instances, the ride has been refused and the appointment missed.

"Effective immediately, our policy is no multi-loading of children," read a recent email to LogistiCare from DSS, reaffirming the requirement.

"DSS is placing a staff member at LogistiCare for purposes of maintaining day to day oversight of this protocol," DSS health-services division director Kate McEvoy wrote to **children's rights lawyer Bonnie Roswig** of Hartford on Tuesday.

**Roswig said she was grateful for the reaffirmation, but said that because the doctor's orders hadn't spurred widespread compliance with the no-shared-ride rules in the past, she wasn't sure whether things will be different now.**

**"I can be optimistic," said Roswig, of the Center for Children's Advocacy. She filed a complaint late last year**



**with the Department of Justice and U.S. Attorney Deirdre Daly's office about no-shared-ride violations that led to missed doctor's appointments and hospital tests for very sick children.**

"What the DSS memos didn't say was that there would be added training for LogistiCare employees," said Roswig, noting that there have also been frequent problems with the rides arriving late or not at all.

LogistiCare, which operates in 40 states, has defended its record in Connecticut, saying the vast majority of the 4 million rides a year go off without a hitch.

The Courant in December reported on Rachel and Charlie Botts of East Hartford, who gave up on LogistiCare after several missed rides and began to leave work to take their daughter, Ariella, 4, to doctor's appointments themselves in the family's Kia Sorrento. Ariella has a form of muscular dystrophy, known as nemaline rod myopathy, which has left her with profoundly weak lungs and skeletal muscles. She has a tracheotomy tube, a ventilator, and gets nutrition through a gastrostomy tube. She uses a wheelchair.

When the story ran, a LogistiCare executive called Rachel Botts, apologized, and asked her to give the company another chance. But donations from around the state and the country enabled the couple to put a down payment on a wheelchair van and they are committed to transporting Ariella, something they can do because they have understanding employers.

In the face of the public pressure, DSS has put the transport contract out to bid, instead of exercising an option to renew the pact with LogistiCare.

The state is seeking companies with at least five years' experience in running a similar service. LogistiCare can be one of the bidders.

The new contract would span three years, with the possibility of two one-year extensions.  
The contract period begins April 1.

<http://www.courant.com/news/connecticut/hc-medicaid-children-medical-rides-0107-20170105-story.html>